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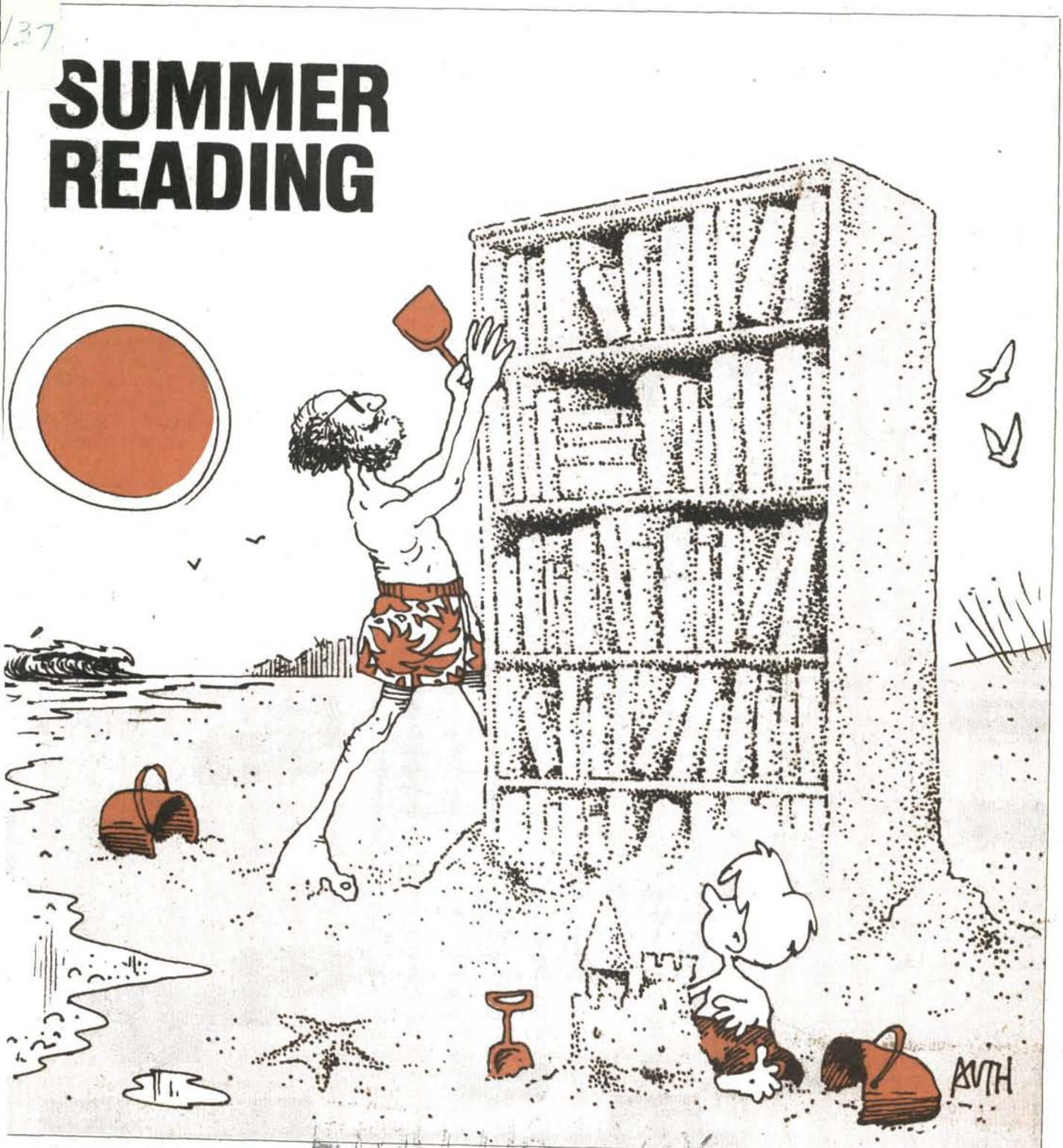
SUMMER READING



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LETTERS.

EMPTY CAVEAT

New York City

Alexander Cockburn writes that "the United States currently 'encourages,' among others, the governments of Guatemala, South Africa, Paraguay and Indonesia, as well as the claims of Pol Pot on Kampuchea. I imagine that the worst Professor Deak could come up with for the Soviet Union would be Qaddafi" ["Beat the Devil," *The Nation*, May 26].

Soviet client states in the Third World are quite as bad a lot as those encouraged by the United States. The carnage in Afghanistan over the past five years is more difficult to monitor than that in El Salvador, but it appears to be at least as extensive. Torture is as prevalent in Syria as in Guatemala, and the slaughter of several thousand people in Hama may put the killings there on a par with those that took place under the Ríos Montt regime. Then there is Vietnam, which gave the world hundreds of thousands of boat people; Iraq, which practices chemical warfare; Ethiopia, which is a human rights disaster area; Cuba, which may have the longest-term political prisoners in the world; and so on. Even Pol Pot, who is now a client of America's ally the People's Republic of China, was supported by the Soviet Union during the worst days of Khmer Rouge terror.

Cockburn tells us that his creed is that he will never be evenhanded. He need hardly have bothered. *Aryeh Neier*

COCKBURN REPLIES

New York City

I was attacking Deak's outrageous assertion that the United States supports "the world's fanatics . . . to a lesser extent" than the Soviet Union and is somehow congenitally less inclined to back undemocratic governments. Neier's balancing act is, if anything, even more squalid, if only for its aroma of evenhanded objectivity. He wants to talk postwar history and its body counts? Let him take colonial wars—Portuguese, French, British—*all* supported by the United States; let him take the U.S. or U.S.-backed butchery in Vietnam, South America, Central America and Africa; let him take Guatemala since the U.S.-organized coup of 1954 (Why confine himself to the Ríos Montt subphase?) or Indonesia just in 1965 (a million right there, killed by U.S.-backed fanatics). Does Neier think there has been a perfect ideological equilibrium in the body count?

Hama was a great crime and I have written so. In fact, Assad, whose regime is indeed stained with blood, has frequently basked in U.S. approval. The United States was pleased by his accession to power from the right wing of the Baath, and if anything it was the United States that, by its covert deeds in the 1940s, was responsible for the grim shape of postliberation Syria, beginning with the coup of Hosni al-Zaim in 1949. Nothing on Israel from Neier, of course, though that nation, financed and backed by the United States, has been responsible for about 200,000 dead and about 2 million refugees in Palestine, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt since 1948. It was China, not the Soviet Union, that supported the Khmer Rouge "in the worst days," and it was the Soviet Union that backed Vietnam in its invasion of Kampuchea, which I imagine even Neier might term a humanitarian act.

With the sanctimonious positivism that passes for liberal discrimination in our era, Neier seems oblivious to the missing pages in the moral ledger he waves at me. Every time Paul Volcker puts the U.S. prime interest rate up one point, $4.5 billion is added overnight to Third World debt service. Volcker might just as well take several thousand undernourished African babies into a field and machine-gun them. As chairman of the Fed, Volcker has been responsible for more deaths than the combined total of every "terrorist" group on the State Department's list. Volcker is not, so far as I know, personally a murderer, but he represents a system called capitalism, in which the United States is the dominant force. Before Neier starts snickering about my lack of evenhandedness in discussing "human rights," he had better realize just how much carnage he has tacitly endorsed without so much as a whimper. *Alexander Cockburn*

CONTRARY IS AS CONTRARY DOES

New York City

It is certainly Mary McCarthy's right to be vicious and vindictive toward Simone de Beauvoir, even to be bitchy clearly out of envy, in the interview with Carol Brightman ["Mary, Still Contrary," *The Nation*, May 19]. While I think it is McCarthy, not de Beauvoir, who is the dreadful bore, and while I am convinced de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins*, one of the great books of the postwar era, will remain fascinating to many generations long after the name Mary McCarthy has disappeared, all that is a matter of opinion. When it comes to facts, however, McCarthy seems deliberately misleading and self-serving. Consider the following:

(1) McCarthy says she met de Beauvoir only once. True, but they met by accident. In 1967, knowing that I was working with Sartre and was a friend of both Sartre and de Beauvoir, McCarthy asked me to arrange a get-together. Sartre and de Beauvoir refused on the ground that they had nothing in common with her. As Sartre said, "She poses as a liberal, and I know that the U.S. intelligentsia considers her on the left, but the fact is that to me, and to us now, she ultimately is a reactionary who defends the American system even while she pretends to oppose the war in Vietnam—as a 'mistake' rather than imperialist policy." The important point is that I communicated Sartre and de Beauvoir's refusal to McCarthy.

(2) I doubt very much that Nathalie Sarraute ever claimed that Sartre was forbidden from seeing her by de Beauvoir. I was often present when Sartre talked about Sarraute to de Beauvoir and made dates with her in front of de Beauvoir. Nor was de Beauvoir jealous of any of Sartre's friends, even those she did not like. To cite but one example: de Beauvoir has remained very close to Sartre's Russian friend Lena Zonina, a poet and writer completely her equal and certainly as good a writer as Sarraute.

(3) Sartre certainly never pitied de Beauvoir. On the contrary, he valued and depended a great deal on her wisdom and insights. De Beauvoir read everything Sartre wrote before he submitted it to his publisher, which he never did unless she thought it was ready. She was always a harsh critic, often making him undertake new versions, especially of his plays. When I was researching his life for a forthcoming biography and was with Sartre three days a week for over two years, I saw him rework sections of *Flaubert* over and over again because, as he said, "Castor [de Beauvoir] told me it still wasn't clear." One does not pity someone one respects and admires.

(4) It was Sartre (and Francis Jeanson, then editor of Sartre's magazine, *Les Temps Modernes*) who attacked Camus, not de Beauvoir. As McCarthy would have known had she read *The Mandarins*, de Beauvoir depicted Camus as a man of great integrity. (Sartre and Jeanson criticized Camus for being a hypocrite over Algeria and over the cold war, and for always trying to please American intellectuals by keeping himself politically clean and uncommitted.) As for Merleau-Ponty, yes, de Beauvoir did attack him in *Les Temps Modernes*. But that was strictly political, and only after Merleau-Ponty attacked Sartre, who then asked de Beauvoir to answer, since the issue was political and involved the whole magazine.

Because of her outspokenness and her fighting spirit, Simone de Beauvoir has made a lot of enemies. It is true that she does not like McCarthy's writing and does not respect her sexual and political views. McCarthy is entitled to fight back on those issues. But attempts to smear de Beauvoir and tell bathroom gossip (false anyway) about her in order to get even for her intellectual criticism of McCarthy is despicable. And for McCarthy to call de Beauvoir a "dirty fighter" is to convict herself of the same charge. De Beauvoir has been in the forefront of the struggle for justice and decency all her life, not only for women but for all of us. McCarthy, at least in her old age, seems intent only on smearing her contemporaries. *John Gerassi*

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Cover drawing by Tony Auth

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Manuscripts: All work submitted will be read by the editors. The magazine cannot, however, be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts unless they are accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes.

Publisher, Hamilton Fish 3rd

Associate Publisher, David Parker; *Advertising Manager,* Carole Kraemer; *Business Manager,* Ann B. Epstein; *Bookkeeper,* Gertrude Silverston; *Art/Production Manager,* Jane Sharples; *Circulation Manager,* Stephen W. Soule; *Subscription Manager,* Cookee V. Klein; *Classified Advertising Manager,* George Monaco; *Receptionist,* Greta Loell; *Mail Clerk,* John Holtz; *Administrative Secretary,* Shirley Sulat; *Production,* Terry Miller; *Typography,* David Acker, Mark Rausher; *Nation Associates,* Claudine Bacher; *Nation News Service,* Jeff Sorensen.

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the first week in January, and biweekly in July and August) by Nation Enterprises and © 1984 in the U.S.A. by the Nation Associates, Inc., 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011. Tel.: 212-242-8400. *Subscription Mail Address:* Nation Subscription Service, P.O. Box 1953, Marion, Ohio 43305. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices. International Telex: 667 155 NATION.

Regular Subscription Price: One year, $40; two years, $72; six months, $20. Add $7 per year postage Canada, Mexico; $13 per year other foreign. All foreign subscriptions must be paid in equivalent U.S. funds. Claims for missed issues must be made within 60 days (120 days, foreign) of publication date; back issues available $3 prepaid ($4 foreign). **Please allow 6-8 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries should be sent to: *The Nation,* Subscription Services, P.O. Box 1953, Marion, Ohio 43305.

EDITORIALS.

Book Ends & Means

What heavy freight even a fragile book must carry nowadays. And what a variety of purposes, both good and bad, reviews of books have come to serve. To begin with, our magazines and newspapers no longer talk to one another much. The cruel polemics and even the mild reservations that kept debates alive and rancorous some decades ago have largely disappeared, and the well of the average magazine contains still waters indeed. One has become a *Reader's Digest* for intellectuals; another a bedraggled cocktail party with the same trans-Atlantic hors d'oeuvres each month; two more, the prissy patriarch and the genteel son, eschew mention of other publications as the very height of bad manners. And so on, except for the liberal/left press, where debate is occasionally more frontal. All of which means, according to the hydraulic theory of repressed impulses, that rancor must surface elsewhere, and what better place for the secret vendetta than the book review, where scores may be settled and debate pre-empted under the guise of even-handed discussion? But there is also something positive animating the discussion of books these days: in addition to being the repositories for ill will, bad faith and rumor, they have at better moments become the occasions for reflection, even extended thought. The essay, which is now as popular with magazine editors as talking heads are with TV producers, has found its way into the book review. And so an appreciation of Alfred Kazin or Jim Harrison, a meditation on the uses to which we have put our Vietnam veterans, a description of the long tradition of antinuclear fiction, await their moment—the publication of a book. In the best of circumstances the book is more than an occasion. This is the bright side of things, but it still means that books are carrying an awful lot of cultural baggage, so perhaps it is not surprising that most of the reviewers and book review editors we canvassed for this Summer Reading issue described a reader's vacation in which they travel *very* light.

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

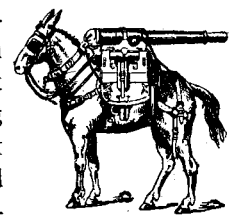
The Auld Sod

The treacly odor of most of the coverage of the President's European trip was almost overpowering, but it was not hard to sniff out the fact that all was not entirely well and that the Reagan party did not find the outside world infinitely malleable to the ecstatic version of reality operant in the White House today.

Take the stopover in Ireland. I had feared that my fellow countrypeople would descend to every indignity in their reception of Reagan, but despite the squalid if understandable behavior of the people of Ballyporeen, there was substantial demonstration of dislike for the man and everything he stands for. Nun-killing (archbishop-killing, too, for that matter) has never gone down well with the Irish—particularly with members of the Catholic hierarchy, none of whom saw fit to attend any of the major festivities. The U.S. press scarcely drew attention to the matter, but in a truly remarkable snub to Reagan, Cardinal Tomás O'Fiaich, the Primate of All Ireland, decided that a pilgrimage to Scotland was the best way of demonstrating his welcome.

But then the Irish have long been sympathetic to the Nicaraguan revolution and the activities of the popular church there. On my last visit home the papers were full of glowing reports by priests and other visitors to Nicaragua, comparing it favorably with other countries in the region. The Bishop of Galway, who dragged Salvadorans to safety when they were fired on during Archbishop Oscar Romero's funeral, has called on the Irish Republic to sever diplomatic relations with the United States.

Therapeutic Nihilism



And at the economic summit in London, where Reagan's people had been hoping for a unanimous endorsement of his policies, all did not go according to plan either. There was sharp talk about U.S. interest rates, the deficit and the loom of Third World debt. Not surprising, really. It's hard not to pin the donkey's tail to the right spot when all that's in the picture is the donkey's backside.

Presumably sensitized by Bolivia's unilateral debt moratorium and the quivers in the banking system, the Reagan Administration now admits that there are some economic problems that the magic of the free market may not be able to cure. Previously, its stance had been similar to what was known in nineteenth-century Viennese medical theory as therapeutic nihilism: that is, letting nature take its course. As William Johnston describes therapeutic nihilism in *The Austrian Mind*, "By 1850 skepticism toward traditional therapy had so taken root that the only medicament used in the General Hospital was cherry brandy. For fear of distorting symptoms, doctors refused to prescribe any remedies."

Johnston follows with an amazingly apt description of Reaganism. In the view of the therapeutic nihilists, "disease comprised part of life: the task of doctors was not to eradicate it but merely to understand it." (Shades of Marx's thesis on Feuerbach!) "The poor dreaded entering the hospital, fearing that they would never leave . . . patients had to pay in advance." One doctor who visited the General Hospital in 1898 offered this description:

> A party of students [were] sounding a woman who was dying of pleurisy or pneumonia, in order that they might each hear the crepitation in her lungs as her last moments approached. She expired before they left the ward. [I] said something about treatment in another case to the professor who was lecturing these young men. The reply was, "Treatment, treatment, that is nothing; it's the diagnosis that we want."

The coincidence is not fortuitous. Therapeutic nihilism in the medical field in Vienna was paralleled, as Johnston points out, by the reluctance of Austrian economists like Carl Menger and Ludwig von Mises to tamper with an unimpeded market economy. And von Mises, God to our economic libertarians, is one of the fathers of Reaganism.

The Advance of Lying

Associated with the Reaganite version of therapeutic nihilism is a wild Reaganite voluntarism about results. After doing nothing to cure the patient, the Reaganites declare him alive and well, even if he is dead and rattling through the gates of the graveyard. This is why lying—the relentless accretion of mendacity, tirelessly repeated, impervious to rebuttal or rebuke—is so central to Reaganism. Since the Reaganites' vision of the world bears no relation to the world that exists, and since their policies achieve precisely the opposite of what they intend, the world has to be recreated as a creature of the will and of effusive imagination. War becomes peace; ruin is reborn as recovery; the world is safer and not more perilous.

This cut-price, ESTian mutation of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is naturally popular. In hard times everyone wants a Siegfried. The press falls into step, miming the Reaganite gait. By way of illustration we need look no further than the June 10 *New York Times*, which carried an enormous article by Claire Sterling on the conclusions of the prosecuting magistrate in the Agca affair. Now, most of what passes for Sterling's journalistic reputation rests on her intent to demonstrate a K.G.B.-Bulgarian plot to kill the Pope. She is an active agent in the prosecution's case against Sergei Antonov and the others. It is not surprising that she should have acquired Italian prosecutor Antonio Albano's report.

Is it then appropriate that *The Times* should feature Sterling as a reporter, without explaining to readers that she has been the prime journalistic exponent of the K.G.B./Pope plot? It is as if the prosecutor in the DeLorean trial were doubling as *The Times*'s courtroom correspondent, and signing the dispatches. Thus does Reaganism corrupt editorial judgment.

Apple and Vinocur

On the matter of the varying degrees of flattery with which the President's voyage was doused in the U.S. media,

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

It is instructive to contrast the performance of *New York Times* correspondents R.W. Apple and John Vinocur. Apple, by ideological disposition scarcely a Reaganaut (unless you count his consorting with leaders of Britain's Social Democrat Party, which is arguably a subvariant of Reaganaucracy), sent some distinctly cool reports of the President's progress, particularly in Ireland.

Vinocur, on the other hand (formerly with the Bonn and now the Paris bureau of *The Times*), has long been a sedulous Reaganaut, ever on the alert against neutralism and any backsliding from the values enshrined in the NATO alliance. Analyzing the mood of Western Europe on the eve of Reagan's trip, Vinocur discerned that Western Europeans have "caught the sense of a reinvigorated United States under Mr. Reagan, and have compared it with what often seems to be the stagnation, both psychic and economic, of their own countries."

Vinocur added, rather mysteriously, "One of the notions now developing in Europe about Mr. Reagan is that he speaks to many Americans in a way that Europeans, quite literally, cannot understand—certainly no more than a Chicagoan or New Yorker could grasp all the ambiguous but reassuring resonance of Charles de Gaulle's telling a rally of hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen, 'I've understood you.'"

It's certainly true that most Chicagoans and New Yorkers would not have understood de Gaulle had he shouted "Je vous ai compris" at them. But it's also true that all those hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen didn't either. The French in question were French-Algerian *colons* who, fearing a sellout by France after four years of struggle against Algerian nationalists, had gathered in 1958 to hear de Gaulle pledge that *Algerie* would be forever *Française*. "Je vous ai compris," de Gaulle roared sonorously at them, and the *colons* imagined that to mean he understood their hopes and dreams and would stand by them. They cheered him lustily. But they were wrong. De Gaulle was indulging in one of the great double-entendres of political history. "I have understood you for what you are," he was saying, "and your hopes and dreams have no place in the future of France." Soon thereafter the *colons* were not cheering de Gaulle but trying to kill him.

The Great Charles

I don't think de Gaulle would have had much liking for the D-day celebrations, if only because this paean to U.S. hegemony would have been, for him (if not for his miserable successor as president today), a most distasteful way of recollecting the liberation of France. And de Gaulle would have been particularly irritated by the spectacle of an American President who, in the words of a *Pravda* correspondent, "having weathered the war far from the front line, in the rear . . . suddenly decides four decades later to travel to the scene of fighting, seeking with the studied smile of a showman, and before the television cameras, not so much to dramatize the turmoil of war as to exploit the glory of the dead." De Gaulle did not like that sort of posturing. Visiting one French town after the liberation, he entered the main square and found a mass of local dignitaries, lapels ablaze with medals and ribbons advertising their deeds in battling the Germans during the occupation. Striding past them with the aloof expression of a man plainly convinced that most of them had been collaborators (which, of course, most of the French were anyway), de Gaulle finally stopped in front of a shabby-looking chap with nothing on his lapels at all. "What's this, my friend," said the general jocularly, "have you forgotten how to sew?"

Second Front Now

Celebration of any military achievement of the past is, by definition, an exercise in deception, since the manner in which military business is conducted has little to do with how such business is recalled afterward. The D-day orgy is a case in point. Quite aside from its relative weight in the defeat of Hitler (sixteen days after the Western Allies put five divisions on the Normandy beaches the Soviet Union launched Operation Bagration which destroyed thirty German divisions in thirty days), the landing had a different cast from the one portrayed in many recent accounts. No one bothered to recall that although Allied intelligence had known of an extra German division, the 352nd, the intelligence officers, true to form, had forgotten to tell the invading forces—with tragic results.

For a sense of the grimness of that day, it's worth looking at the great S.L.A. Marshall's *The Soldier's Load*, published by the Marine Corps Association. Addressing the argument that since fear weakens a man, every extra ounce he carries will further drain him of muscular power and mental coordination, Marshall remarks:

> In the initial assault waves at Omaha Beachhead there were companies whose men started ashore, each with four cartons of cigarettes in his pack—as though the object of operations was trading with the French. Some never made the shore because of the cigarettes. They dropped into deep holes during the wade-in, or they fell into the tide nicked by a bullet. Then they soaked up so much weight they could not rise again. They drowned . . . the greater number were cast up on the beach. It impressed the survivors unforgettably—that line of dead men along the sands, many of whom had received but trifling wounds. . . . when I had concluded my work with the survivors of the companies which had landed during the initial Omaha assault, the impression was inescapable that weight and water . . . were the cause of the greater part of our losses at the beach.

More of the truth of war in those words than what we have been hearing recently, but then the two most bellicose leaders in NATO are a man whose closest contact with war was the percussion of a movie-set six-gun next to his ear, and a woman with a quasi-mystic devotion to the will (confident, like Reagan, of its power to alter reality *tout court*), who in 1982 ordered the sinking of the General Belgrano off the Falkland Islands, thus aborting promising peace negotiations which might have saved the lives of hundreds.

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CALVIN TRILLIN

According to *The New York Times*, a survey taken in Western Europe recently indicates that Europeans don't much like the English. No news there. The organization responsible for the survey—the European Economic Community—says that the hostility toward Great Britain is the result of a dispute now going on over the E.E.C.'s spending practices and agricultural program, but I don't think that's it at all. I think that Europeans are hostile toward the English because the English have some irritating habits—the habit, for instance, of ending sentences with questions that sound like reprimands. You say it's difficult for you to tell because you haven't read the survey? Well, you'll have to read it then, won't you. See how snotty that sounds? It sounds as if the person who said it expects you to say, "Well, yes, I suppose I will have to read it, and it was terribly stupid of me not to have realized that before." Think how snotty it would sound in an English accent. Think how snotty it would sound to a Frenchman whose understanding of English may be imperfect and who might have thought that the Englishman was saying "Quit standing on my foot—would you?" It sounds snotty, but the English actually don't mean anything by it. They don't know any other way to talk.

Why do the English talk so funny? For one thing, they're all hard of hearing. All Englishmen are hard of hearing. That's why they end a lot of sentences with questions—just to check and make sure the other fellow heard what they were saying. (When you think about it that way, it's not snotty; it's actually rather thoughtful.) That's why they're always saying "I say!" It gives the other fellow a warning that they're about to say something, and then he knows to tune in. This used to be a secret—that all Englishmen are hard of hearing. All the English knew, of course, but they wouldn't let it out to foreigners. I'm the one who found out about it. I found out watching Harold Pinter plays.

The people in Harold Pinter plays are very hard of hearing. That is what professors of drama mean, I suppose, when they talk about how a dramatist has a heightened sense of reality: he takes people who are just hard of hearing and he makes them very hard of hearing. People in Pinter plays are always repeating themselves because the other character didn't hear them the first time:

"Hello."
"What?"
"Hello."
"I thought you said goodbye."
"No. Hello."
"What?"
"Goodbye."

Even after I uncovered the secret of Harold Pinter, I tried to keep it to myself. I had learned my lesson several years before, when I revealed that the Italian movies everybody considered so profound would seem silly to anyone who understood Italian. I wasn't claiming that I understood Italian; in fact, Italian often sounds to me as if the speaker is telling a lot of other people to quit standing on his foot. I was just saying that Americans who went to see an Italian movie that had been called profound concentrated hard on getting the subtitles read before the scene changed, figured that a lot of the nuances must have been lost in reducing great hunks of dialogue into one line of type and didn't stop to consider the possibility that the movie was simply silly. Then a couple of the profound Italian directors made their first movies in English, and all the critics said the movies were silly. I thought the critics would then realize that all the movies they had said were profound would also have seemed silly if only they had understood the dialogue, but instead they said that even a profound director can't hit every time at bat. I also thought a lot of people would come up to me and apologize for having called me a philistine and a hopeless lout, but nobody did. So when people asked what I thought of Harold Pinter plays—even after I knew the secret—I just said, "Very English. His plays are very English."

Of course, the dispute at the headquarters of the European Economic Community must have been exacerbated by the special way that people who go into the British diplomatic service talk—particularly their habit of putting together packages of adverbs and adjectives that don't match, like "perfectly awful" and "frightfully nice." I know they don't mean anything by it, but it can't be much fun to listen to all the time. The French representative to the E.E.C. must get the feeling that he's constantly being served a chocolate parfait with béarnaise sauce.

"I say!" the representative of the United Kingdom says, although the warning is quite unnecessary, since the French hear better than anyone (that's why they talk so fast).

"Please don't," the French representative says. "At least not so soon before lunch."

At this point, I assume, the Italian representative has the wit to speak only in subtitles.

It can't help that what the English want to discuss in the E.E.C. is the agricultural program. While the French or Belgian or Italian representative is politely negotiating an agreement for exporting vegetables to the United Kingdom, he is secretly seething with the knowledge that the English are going to overcook them. This must be the sort of thing diplomats are referring to when they talk about hidden agendas. The French representative is supposedly talking in purely economic terms about the exportation of asparagus, but the memory of what the British had done to a French asparagus he once encountered in Brighton is causing him to negotiate through clenched teeth. The British representative sails along without noticing.

"I say! That would be terribly good," he says, as the agreement is reached.

"But is it the green asparagus or the white asparagus that you want, monsieur?" the French representative says.

"Well, that's up to you," the Englishman says. "Isn't it."

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Rhapsody in Red, White & Blue

MARK SHECHNER

AN AMERICAN PROCESSION. *By Alfred Kazin. Alfred A. Knopf. 397 pp. $18.95.*

Last year, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich reissued Alfred Kazin's first book, *On Native Grounds*, in a fortieth anniversary edition, an event that went virtually unnoticed save at Hilton Kramer's *The New Criterion*, where the knives were being sharpened in the wake of Kazin's caustic observations in *The New York Review of Books* ("Saving My Soul at the Plaza") on the Committee for the Free World's recent conference. Kazin's strictures on that affair earned him a rebuke by *The New Criterion*: a reconsideration of *On Native Grounds* by Kenneth Lynn, who took it to task for its errors of fact (Kazin, bound to Manhattan, had thought that there were mountains in Hemingway's northern Michigan) and for its unbridled leftism. Written in the dog days of the Depression, *On Native Grounds* was, it seems, unaccountably sour on the prospects for American society and irresponsibly "radical" in its scorn for American business.

That flawed but promising book (Lynn gave it passing grades for style) was, we were told, the high-water mark of Kazin's career, and even it has not stood the test of time so well as its contemporary volumes: Perry Miller's *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* and F.O. Matthiessen's *The American Renaissance*. "No one can tell us," Lynn solemnly quoted Kazin, "all that F. Scott Fitzgerald meant when he said that 'there are no second acts in American lives,' or why we have been so oppressed by the sense of time, or why our triumphs have been so brittle." Lynn concluded, "When he wrote those searing words in the preface to the first edition of *On Native Grounds*, the twenty-seven-year-old Kazin was unwittingly composing the epitaph for his own career."

They don't mince words at *The New Criterion*, just reputations, their mission in American letters being to grind all literary reputations into rubble. The careful discriminations that marked T.S. Eliot's original *Criterion* in the 1930s have degenerated into demolitions in Kramer's new magazine, whose first principle resembles nothing so much as the slogan of the Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War: *No pasarán*. But even by the highest *New Criterion* standard, which holds that no career is so exalted that it cannot be blackened, this assault was uncommonly foolish, for it singled out for special reprimand Kazin's "radicalism," a posture so elusive that no one lacking a neoconservative radar gun can spot it. Kazin, it seems, had fancied himself a radical in *On Native Grounds* and taken the usual swipes at capitalism—didn't everyone in the 1930s?—and Lynn, sounding quite as if he had uncovered a major cache of microfilms in an innocent-looking pumpkin, took him at his word. But to most readers Kazin's rhapsodies on America, from *On Native Grounds* to the present, sound more like George Gershwin than, say, Vernon Parrington, to whom Lynn compares him. As for his "failure" to appear for the second act, it comes as a distinct surprise to those legions of critics who would gladly trade Kazin's dismal record—seven books since *On Native Grounds*—for their own, and would be only too happy to take the blame for a vagrant mountain or two in Michigan's upper peninsula as the price of such failure.

Indeed, in an age like ours, which lacks a single great critic to dominate and define the landscape, Kazin is the closest thing we have to a master—a curious master to be sure, caustic and poetic, fonder of rhapsodies than of analyses, but a master in terms that any student of literature can appreciate. He commands a major literature; he possesses a distinct point of view which charges whatever it touches with meaning; and he writes with a pungency and concision that no other American critic can equal.

An American Procession is the chronicle of a 100-year period in American literary history, from 1830 to 1930, starting with Emerson and halting abruptly with Eliot, Pound, Faulkner and Hemingway in midcareer. Kazin begins with Emerson because "Whitman . . . predicted correctly that 'America in the future, in her long train of poets and writers, while knowing more vehement and luxuriant ones, will . . . acknowledge nothing nearer [than] this man, the actual beginner of the whole procession.'" It was Emerson's commanding sense of self that precipitated so much of what was militantly individual in the American character. This God-intoxicated man was the intellectual godfather of the writers who came after him, even those like Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, who took a dim view of Emerson's indwelling divinity and held themselves in strict opposition:

> What Emerson called his "one" doctrine—"the infinitude of the private mind"—nevertheless gave a special radiance to *Nature*, *Walden*, "Song of Myself," and even *Moby-Dick*, a radiance that has allowed millions to remember "morning in America."

This is the sort of aria we have come to expect of Kazin, whose own word intoxication strikes us as a displacement downward of Emerson's God intoxication.

But *An American Procession* is ruled by darker notes, and it is in the chapters on Melville, Poe, Hawthorne, Henry Adams, Henry James, Emily Dickinson and T.S. Eliot that Kazin warms to his theme. Our national penalty for our Emersonian ecstasy and self-exaltation is a trait that de Tocqueville identified as the solitude of the individual in democratic society. (It is no accident that Kazin's history looks like a manic-depressive cycle on a national scale, as if Kazin himself had discovered in the American procession a map of his own problematic emotions.) Thoreau's isolation found relief only in words, his journal being "the most unflagging example . . . of a man's having to write his life in order to convince himself that he had lived it." Hawthorne's solitude, "in the 'dismal chamber' of the Salem home where he practiced his art, was more than a personal habit; it was a commitment to the wholly mental life of his own characters." In Melville we encounter "the peculiar bitterness of a man who has lost everything except the will to survive by writing." But perhaps it was Henry James who spoke for all of them when he confessed in a letter:

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> The port from which I set out was . . . that of the essential loneliness of my life, and it seems to be the port also, in sooth, to which my course again finally directs itself. This loneliness [is] deeper than my "genius," deeper than my "discipline," deeper than my pride, deeper, above all, than the deep counterminings of art.

Clearly, a myth is being evoked here, one which will be taken in skeptical quarters as further proof of Kazin's enduring radicalism—the myth of the artist's alienation from American society. But alienation, in the sense of revulsion, is not what Kazin is driving at: *An American Procession* is anything but a lecture on spirit versus commerce. Kazin is after something more fundamental: a conception of where the words come from and how art attains *power*. His descant on the American writer's reclusiveness claims only that the imagination grazes in lonely pastures and that without the loneliness there is no art. The "will to survive by writing" is a universal property of the "isolato" (Melville's word), who primes his imagination by sacrificing social relations. This sounds like Edmund Wilson's thesis, in *The Wound And The Bow*, that art thrives on a physical or neurotic wound, and to a degree it is, though Kazin does not force it where it patently does not apply—to Emerson, Whitman and Twain, who drew their water from different wells. Though Kazin is relentless in pursuit of his thesis, *An American Procession* is far from being a thesis-ridden book.

The myth of the artist as the great isolato applies in complicated ways to Henry Adams, who is the hero of this history. He lived, after all, not at Walden Pond but in Washington, where he was the center of a bustling social circle. He was a social gadfly and a public man, boasting two Presidents among his ancestors, and diplomats among his intimates. Yet he was also an "immensely private, proud, unfathomably touchy person . . . the most public recluse in Washington." His private sorrow, Kazin claims, was sexual, and his famed *Schadenfreude*—his delight in the more dangerous follies of nations—was the projection of his solitude, "his sexual sorrow, and his special dryness of heart and mockery onto a world at war." And yet, despite that dryness of heart he understood, as did no other writer save Whitman, that sex was power. This theorist of the Virgin and the Dynamo would write with bitter poignancy toward the end of his life: "All one has cared about has been a few women, and they have worried one more than falling empires."

"Power" is a key term in Kazin's lexicon, one which is as critical to his vision of American literature as isolation. Kazin is attentive to two kinds of power which gather and fuse in the work of some writers: national power and the power of art. Where they are drawn together, as in Hemingway, whose command of experience "belonged to an imperial race," they create a portrait of the artist as a model of the national character—the brag and bluster of a nation ordaining the self-assurance of the writer. In Adams that confluence of powers operated differently, through the identification of the self with history, quite as if the interior life were a metaphor for the march of events and Adams could take the pulse of modern life by simply touching his wrist. The submission of principles to power, which was Adams's great theme in *History of the United States*, was also the very design of his writing: to subordinate the materials of history to the rhythms of myth and the confident order of a lucid, supple, periodic prose.

> The world was running down, and he was going to show why—in prose that would have to do for mathematics, but would be as elegant. Science was the new language. Like his own *History*, his *nuova scienza* would show that necessity unrolls in set quantities and therefore could be fixed in the rhythms of his own prose.

For Adams, then, the power of language might thereby be a rival to state power rather than, as it was with Hemingway, merely its unconscious extension. He was the last of the historians who held history to be a branch of literature and an item of moral education. As one of the ruling myth makers of American history, "Adams was not interested in telling the 'truth' about himself—whatever that was. His aim was to present himself as History."

Here, as elsewhere in *An American Procession*, the margin blurs and we are no longer certain who is being described, Adams or Kazin. And the blurring is intentional, for if Kazin, like Adams, is going to produce a myth of American culture, it shall be one capacious enough to include himself. What are we to make of the fact that Adams, not Twain, not Melville, not Whitman, is the moral center of this book, the single writer in *An American Procession* who was neither a novelist nor a poet but who wrote histories in which the properties of fiction—style, plot, character, drama and myth—were all deployed? The historian, in effect, dominates a book on novelists and poets. There is a dramatic element in this book, the drama of the literary historian composing a myth of American consciousness in order to explain it from within.

There is nothing out of order in that: it is what criticism at its most passionate normally does. But what is remarkable in Kazin's case is that this testing of literature against the self is so relentless and so assertively public that we are compelled to view Kazin as a product of the history he writes, the history of American individualism and its discontents. In reading *An American Procession*, I find myself underlining those passages in which Kazin, in trying to capture the quintessence of a writer (and Kazin goes in heavily for quintessences), sounds like he is composing epigrams about himself. The paean in praise of Henry Adams and his style is the place where Kazin's own style is incited to its greatest exertions. Here Kazin writes competitively, trading Adams sentence for sentence, image for image, cadence for cadence, like a boxer. Kazin's watchwords are intensity, compression, vehemence, energy, style, intoxication, force, avidity, ecstasy, frenzy, acceleration, delirium, relentlessness, power, all of which guide our attention toward Kazin himself. "The great thing," he quotes James as saying, "is to be *saturated* with something, and I choose the form of my saturation."

We needn't seek far to observe how closely Kazin's thesis expresses his conception of himself: as an isolato, an ecstatic, a word-intoxicated writer. Throughout his career, Kazin has had a poor instinct for joining up. A New York intellectual in the 1940s, with all the birthmarks of the tribe, he was never a member of the *Partisan Review* cenacle. By and large he has eschewed politics altogether, and there is precious little of it in any of his books, save what has been absolutely essential in characterizing the New York scene. He regards himself first and foremost as a writer who has gone his own way and who has brought the resources of language to bear on American cultur-

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al history, past and present.

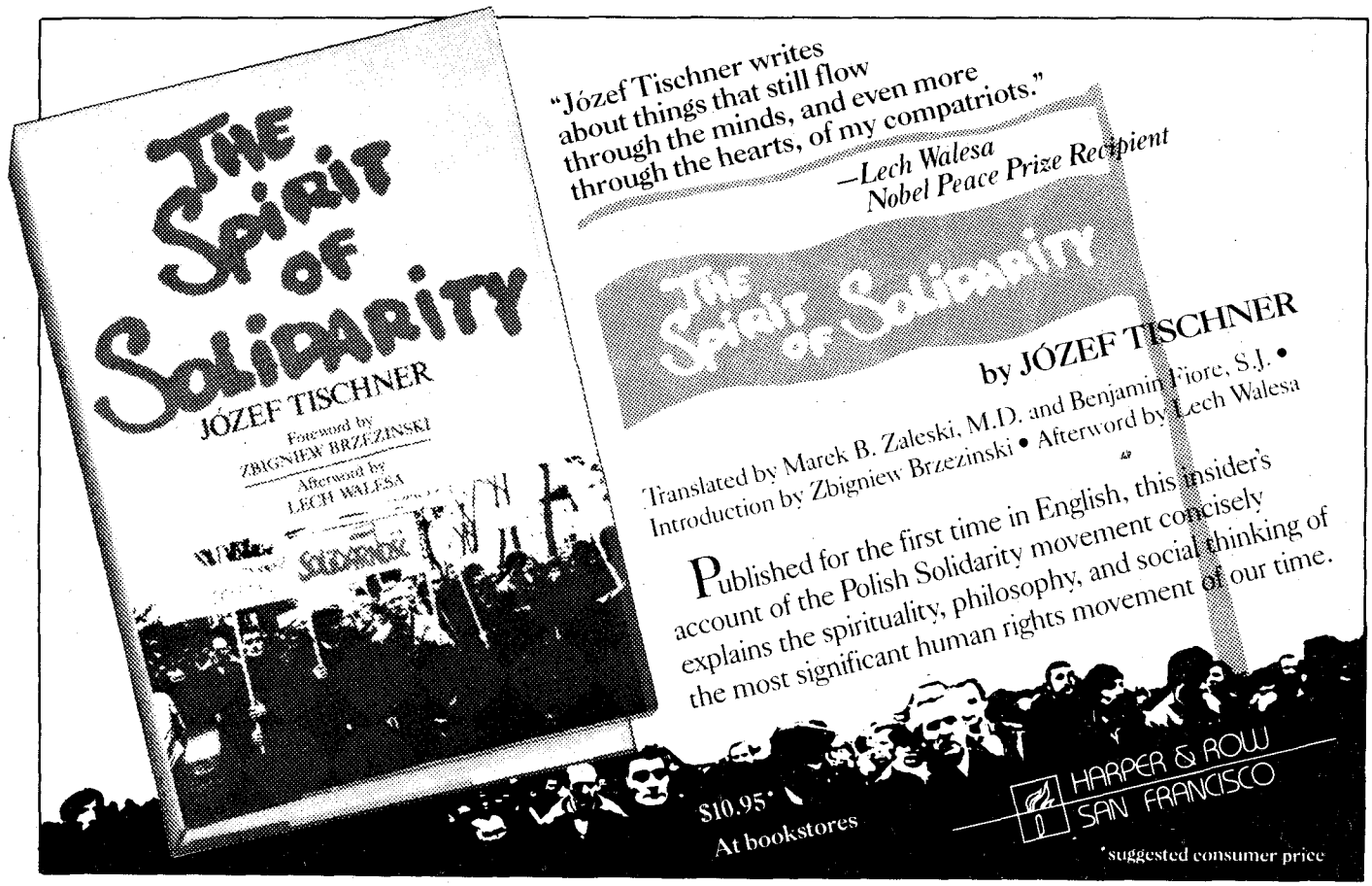
It is impossible to ignore Kazin's language, which operates at a pitch of compression beyond the capability of other critics and all but a handful of novelists. Kazin is always pressing against the envelope of language, straining against its nets and its disabilities. It is surprising that he does not quote the line from Eliot's "East Coker" about each venture being "a raid on the inarticulate/With shabby equipment always deteriorating," for surely that has been the spirit of Kazin's work all his life. These raids on the inarticulate have as their goal a precision of definition and a perfection of style. Only Kazin's is not the transparent, urbane style of a Wilson or a Pritchett but a more intense and compact style, compressed in places to an epigrammatic concision, elsewhere lambent and lyrical, full of liquid sonorities. Writing like that is not taught in graduate schools, and not much valued there either, where the most admired styles court a margin of unintelligibility as a token of profundity. The sentence that defies parsing, so the theory goes, refers us to depths beyond language.

Unlike those postmodernist critics who despair of language by precept and content themselves with either the stale rites of cliché or the mirthless pleasures of *jouissance*, Kazin begins his task armed with the conviction that raids on the inarticulate are bound to yield conquests. That may be a token of Kazin's naïveté and sentimentality, and Kazin is both a naïve and sentimental critic whose prime intellectual equipment is an eager and bursting heart. But therein lies his power: he approaches writing unencumbered by theories of disablement and is always poised to wrest meaning from the miasmas of history and the dark pools of language. Which is another way of saying that Kazin is a humanist.

Still, one may ask, Who is going to read such a book? What graduate seminar is going to heed the words of a generalist who has no method to promote, no great hash to settle, only a code of sensibility (that old-fashioned word that marks him as a man of another era), a burden of melancholy to which he assigns credit for the universal gift of the poetic, and a style that defies imitation?

An American Procession broaches no new historical ideas: thematically it is thin. Kazin is not interested in new perspectives and new syntheses, and he certainly has no interest in advancing the state of criticism or revolutionizing opinion. One learns little in reading this book, certainly nothing importable to the classroom. Rather, one enlarges one's sympathies and one's senses and comes away refreshed by evidence of the mind's capacity to define experience by purely verbal means. These essays are character portraits, extended tableaux rather like those Kazin has drawn so stunningly in his three volumes of memoirs, *A Walker in the City*, *Starting Out in the Thirties* and *New York Jew*, and one is inclined to think of *An American Procession* as an extension of the portraitist's method to the historian's discipline.

An American Procession, then, makes virtually no contribution to our *thinking* about American literature, and yet to say that is to be made aware of Kazin's profound distrust of ideas and their tendency to strangle the imagination. It is of himself and his own sensibility that he speaks when he quotes Eliot's remark that Henry James had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it, for if it is possible to construct history, as James constructed fiction, entirely upon sensibility—upon heightened senses and a painter's eye for color and line—then Alfred Kazin's impressionist history of American writing is such a book. □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The Vet Fetish

CAROL BRIGHTMAN

LONG TIME PASSING: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation. *By Myra MacPherson. Doubleday. 663 pp. $19.95.*

Not so long ago Vietnam veterans were consigned to a strange oblivion. They were too hot for a public long accustomed to the cooler transmission of the facts of war via television. If the reproach heaped on soldiers returning from Vietnam sprang as much from revulsion for the war itself as from horror at their mangled spirits, the effect was the same. Their isolation preserved the peace at home for a society unable to confront the shattering lessons of Vietnam.

Today, nearly ten years after the fall of American power in Southeast Asia, veterans have won the curious distinction of being the most studied subgroup in the United States. The psychological literature on post-traumatic stress disorder alone would fill a small library, and its illumination of the private mechanisms for coping with cataclysms of a systemic order is now working its way through the academies with a potential effect not unlike that of Freud's early work with female hysterics. Most of these studies, such as the four-volume *Legacies of Vietnam: Comparative Adjustment of Veterans and their Peers* (1981) and *War Stress and Trauma: The Vietnam Veteran Experience* (1984), have been commissioned by the Veterans Administration, the same institution which has steadfastly refused to honor the claims of Vietnam veterans suffering from psychological disorders and the myriad illnesses and disabilities associated with exposure to Agent Orange.

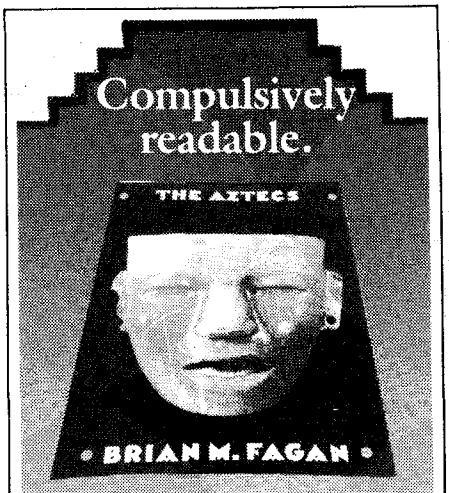
Twenty-six major health studies of Vietnam veterans, including five specifically on cancer, are currently being conducted for the Federal government, most of them for the V.A. In the wake of an onslaught of anecdotal data and one major epidemiological study produced by veterans' groups on behalf of Agent Orange victims, the government has passed the buck—and a very handsome buck indeed—to the scientific community.

In the publishing world this official research has been matched by a stream of books which began with Robert Lifton's *Home from the War* in 1973 and culminates today with the lengthiest chronicle of all—*Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation*, by *Washington Post* reporter Myra MacPherson. And strangely enough, now that the image of the troubled veteran, subtly altered by the media, is stronger than the image of the morally troublesome actions he was led to perform in Vietnam, his experience is still distorted and the war itself remains under wraps. In *Long Time Passing*, which in timeless innocence "seeks neither to prove the rightness or wrongness of the war nor to refight old ideological battles but to illuminate the effect of the war *as it was* on the generation asked to fight it," the lessons of the Vietnam War are no longer even considered. Like the eruption of Mount St. Helens, it just happened. All eyes are on the survivors, whose peace was shattered and who still carry the unexploded capacity to shatter ours.

One wishes that a single hardy scout among the army of psychologists, sociologists and journalists who have moved in on the Vietnam generation would go after the ghosts that haunt it—after Walt Rostow, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk and, most of all, after the spectral Robert McNamara. That none have is no accident, as we used to say about Vietnam, so long as the war continues to be viewed as the well-intentioned mistake that liberal analysts from Malcolm Browne (*The New Face of War*, 1965) to David Halberstam (*The Best and the Brightest*, 1972) to Stanley Karnow (*Vietnam: A History*, 1983) have taught us to believe it was. In fact, the current obsession with the veteran as hapless victim eerily mirrors the passive way we have, as a society, come to view ourselves in relation to a twenty-year drive for conquest that scorched and poisoned the earth of a small nation 10,000 miles away, and still poisons the bodies and minds of a generation of combatants at home.

In *Long Time Passing*, which explores the postwar experience of The Maimed, Hawks and Doves, The Criminals, The Disordered, The Significant

Carol Brightman edited Viet-Report *in the 1960s. She is an associate editor of* Geo *and co-author, with Larry Rivers, of* Drawings and Digressions *(Clarkson N. Potter).*



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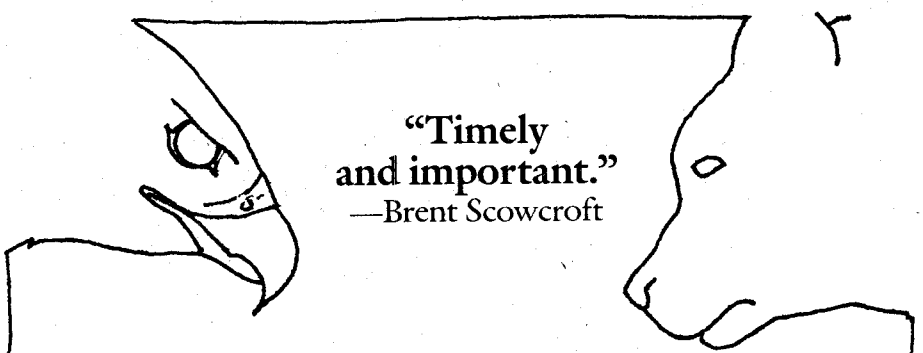

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Others, Successful Veterans, The Deserters, The Exiles and The Blacks, among others, veterans are plucked out of their moment of history. Their injuries are invoked to remind us not of the nature of the war but of the need of its American victims for sympathy. MacPherson's handling of antiwar veterans is less considerate. One chapter is devoted to Scams, in which draft evasion and resistance to the war are hopelessly muddled, and another to Women at the Barricades. "I gave my all to the movement," sighs one of the latter, straight out of *Doonesbury*. "Now it's time for myself." MacPherson's caricature of political activism would be unworthy of comment did it not reveal her inability to imagine that anything significant can be learned or gained through organized resistance to the state. Instead, her interest and sympathy are reserved for veterans who recall the awful moments of surrender to the mingled fear and bloodlust of the battlefield.

For the American public, veterans' flashbacks have come to constitute a kind of psychodrama whereby the essential trauma of helplessness in a field of fire is re-experienced again and again. "Are you up for my horror story? My *best* horror story?" Paul Barnicle, a former medic in Chu Lai, asks MacPherson. "There was this suicide attempt. I had to pump his stomach. I asked his [evacuation] date and he was so short. Just weeks left." Barnicle asked the soldier, a Jewish kid named Daniel, "Why would you do this?"

"I've been in artillery for ten and a half months," the soldier said, "and I've done everything they've asked me to. I've killed people. I'm just sick and tired of the killing."

The medic sent him to a shrink to exempt him from further combat. "A few days later I got a DOA [dead on arrival]," the medic continued. "They handed me a poncho. It was 150 pounds of body parts." Barnicle had to fish around for the dog tags. "It was Daniel. He had taken a claymore mine and cradled it in his arms and detonated it." The shrink had sent the kid back as a malingerer. Barnicle, who had been bagging bodies for months, couldn't stand it alone anymore and called for a rabbi, who was flown down from Da Nang. He said, "Rabbi, don't you want to see this?" and opened up the poncho. The rabbi turned on Barnicle in disgust.

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"What is wrong with *you*," he said. "What is wrong with you that you could do this? You're an *animal*."

The drama marches on: the stink of burning flesh, the "twofer" body count when the dead woman is pregnant, the legendary gonads-in-the-mouth story which encapsulates the history of all the mutilated buddies until real and imagined barbarity justifies murderous mayhem in revenge, and the recurring postwar dream from which the family man awakens in his bed at home sweating because he has just missed the last plane out of Vietnam.

These are war stories torn from their context in a war that was inconceivable without them. In *Long Time Passing*, as in Gloria Emerson's *Winners and Losers*, which it resembles in its privatization of the veterans' experience, the stories of helplessness and victimization are marshaled in the now-fashionable campaign to put the "tragedy" of Vietnam behind us—a campaign whose usefulness to the Pentagon and the National Security Council should be obvious to anyone. Its danger for the rest of us is that once the link between the veterans' experience and the nature of the Vietnam War is cut, we are further insulated from the critical lessons of the past. Perhaps that is just the point. Precisely because the collective experience of the Vietnam veterans threatens the prevailing belief in the rational behavior of the American government, liberals like MacPherson have absolved them from the burden of their history.

"To reach reconciliation," MacPherson writes, "we as a country must get *beyond* the politics of Vietnam, beyond the rancor, beyond the debate." "If America wants its Vietnam veterans to be cleansed," she quotes Philip Caputo as saying, "it must give them . . . compassion for having been misused, dignity for having answered the call to arms and doing their duty as they saw it, [and] respect for having had the courage and tenacity to survive." In *Long Time Passing* those fine sentiments culminate in the plea to "understand the coexistence of nobility of service and the misguidedness of the war." Veterans, in effect, are reborn in the noble image of military service—and the path to the next misguided intervention is, *mirabile dictu*, cleared once again.

It may be unfair to hold Myra MacPherson accountable for failing to integrate the public and private records of the war when so many others have failed as well. But she is certainly vulnerable to criticism for failing to deliver on her stated concern for the welfare of today's veterans. MacPherson makes little of it in her 663 pages, but the overwhelming message of the testimonies she has elicited is that after all the studies, the fanfare about Agent Orange and the ticker-tape exhortations to honor Vietnam Veterans Week, what has been rehabilitated is the *image* of veterans, not their lives.

While most individual veterans have by now been folded back into families—a safety net that was often missing on their return—veterans as a group have been unable to find relief from a persistently high incidence of drug addiction, alcoholism, unemployment, criminal convictions, psychological disorders and Agent Orange-related health problems, which now reach into the maternity ward. In the uncorrected proofs of *Long Time Passing*, alcoholism is reported to be 60 percent higher among Vietnam veterans than among their nonveteran peers. The number of hospitalized vets identified as alcoholics in V.A. centers is said to have *tripled* since 1970. (For some reason, these two citations have been removed from the hard-cover edition of the book.) By the mid-1970s Vietnam veterans constituted a third of the Federal inmate population, an astonishing figure reinforced by the 1981 *Legacies* report that one out of four veterans canvassed had been in prison at some time since leaving military service.

Nationwide, Vet Centers today serve as the halfway houses denied to the returning soldiers; their importance to many of the veterans interviewed by MacPherson is critical. But peer support alone has not armed veterans for the arduous political struggle necessary to rehabilitate the government agencies responsible for their plight: namely, the military services, the V.A. and Congress. Nor will the attention of journalists like MacPherson provide much help so long as the institutional framework both for the war and for the care and feeding of veterans remains unexamined.

The idea that the liberation of veterans and their families from the curse of Vietnam might require some fundamental change in American institutions never enters *Long Time Passing*, which ends at the wall of names, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: "It just says, 'Here

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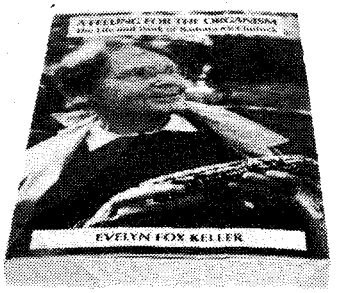

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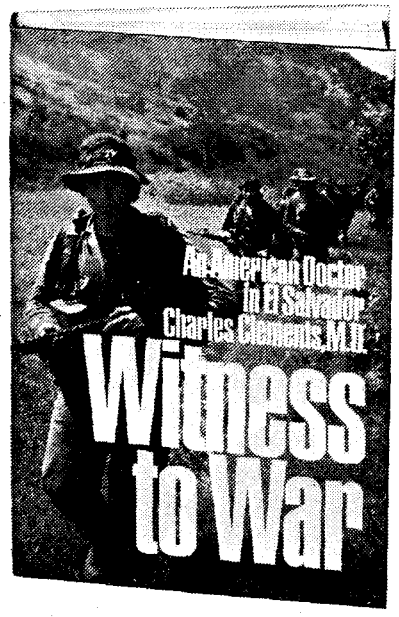

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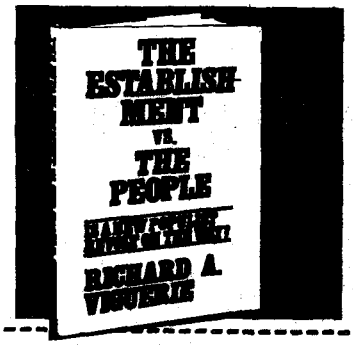

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is the price.'" We have not moved from Johnson to Reagan and from Vietnam to Central America for nothing. The idea of intervention remains unchallenged, as does the militarization of American foreign policy, and in the absence of a repudiation of both, the immense suffering of the men who were sent to the killing grounds is privatized. In the end, public concern for their suffering amounts to little more than an expression of guilt for the homecoming they never got.

While I was wading through MacPherson's profiles of the maimed and the born-again men of war, I picked up what was probably the first published testimony of Vietnam veterans, *The Dellums Committee Hearings on War Crimes in Vietnam* (1972). The difference is startling. During the hearings, which were inspired by the government's scapegoating of a few men for massacres like My Lai, veterans told members of Congress what *they did* in Vietnam to illuminate the standard operating procedures of the war. In *Long Time Passing* veterans tell an inquiring reporter what was *done to them* in Vietnam; the telling has no political purpose beyond a personal effort at catharsis. MacPherson, who "cried with some and laughed with others, got drunk with some, smoked grass with others," moves from case to case like a candy striper making the rounds at General Hospital. She is, by her own account, catching up on a war she sat out in Washington until Carol Burnett, playing the stricken mother in *Friendly Fire,* alerted her to the dangers that would await her own 19-year-old son if he were drafted.

Long Time Passing suffers from MacPherson's inexperience with both the institution in which her subjects came of age, the military, and (less forgivable in a Washington reporter) the foreign policy establishment whose imperial ambitions ensnared them. But the book's most serious flaw lies in its caricature of the Vietnam generation itself, for whom "protesting was a great place to get laid, get high, and listen to some great rock" and the war was, well, hell. This is not the book we need; its failures nonetheless remind us of the one we need very much, a book that might well begin with a question that Frances FitzGerald raised in a talk delivered to a 1983 conference, Vietnam Reconsidered, at the University of Southern California. "What do the veterans have

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to tell us? What do they have to tell future soldiers?" she asked. "First, that killing and risking one's life demand moral seriousness. Soldiers must ask the purpose, and if they do not do it sooner, they'll have to later, and it'll be more painful then." Soldiers, that is, and the rest of us. □

Romancing the Home

PICO IYER

SUNDOG. *By Jim Harrison. E.P. Dutton. 241 pp. $15.95.*

Jim Harrison is one of that renegade band of drifters and dreamers—including Sam Shepard, Tom McGuane, Jack Kerouac and sometimes Norman Mailer—who regard their homeland with the tenderness and solicitude of lovelorn swains. Like Shepard's monologues or Mailer's jeremiads or Kerouac's solos, Harrison's lyric flights are, at heart, songs of innocence and experience, chanting his country's praises, mourning its losses. These vagabond visionaries are not flag-waving patriots so much as votaries of America as symbol, promise and ideal; they suffer not from parochialism so much as from a romantic's expanded sense of boundary. And all these freethinking hobos constantly yearn to rescue and recover their country's lost youth—its vanished pastures, its Indian relics, the clear-cut rituals of the Wild West. All, in the end, lust after innocence and are hungry for a state of grace, a home.

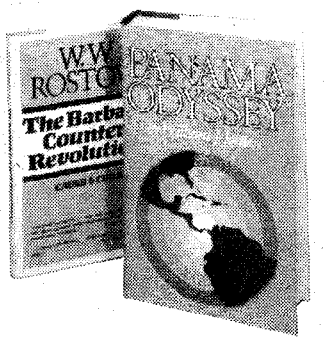
In Harrison this longing becomes a search for the natural sanctuaries he knew as a boy. Thus, in the midst of confused wanderings and strung-out aspirations, his characters invariably return, in reverie or reminiscence, to the sylvan places that were their childhood haunts. ("In the woods," writes Emerson, "we return to reason and faith.") Harrison's fiction is drenched in nostalgia, in wistful memories of fathers, first loves and discoveries in the woods (to some extent, of course, all these things are America; it seemed most grand when he was small).

In *Sundog* two such voyages dovetail: the physical pilgrimage of a brittle New York City journalist to a homestead in the wilds of Michigan inhabited by an old wanderer named Strang; and the weathered ancient mariner's account of his own hegira. Dwelling in a cabin in the woods near a running stream, the old codger has fashioned what amounts in Harrison's world to a lease on the Garden of Eden: he is attended by a loyal dog and a lovely Costa Rican nymph, and is treated to hearty home cooking (Harrison is the most exacting gourmand west of his urban counterpart, Robert Parker) and Stravinsky all around. Settled within this Henry Millerish shrine, Strang spends most of the novel rambling along the byways of his memory and imagination, collecting en route flashes of beauty and a handful of stories, short and tall. And, as elsewhere in Harrison, the return to boyhood becomes a kind of religious revival—a reawakening of possibility, a rehearsal of a leap of faith. Strang is the lay preacher of this natural religion. "Of all beautiful things, I take to rivers the strongest," he admits in a typical moment. "They give me that incredible sweet feeling I once got from religion."

Naturally enough, the patron saint of such a faith is the household god of woody cabins, the guru of all craftsmen, isolatos and pioneers, the yogi who turned common values on their heads, Thoreau. It was he, after all, who first forged a way of living at an angle to American society—and there is no more ardent angler than Jim Harrison. It is no coincidence, then, that Harrison and his characters go fishing with Thoreauvian ceremony and deliberation. For they approach rivers in much the same spirit as the transcendentalist meditated on his pond: to plumb silence and solitude, to take the depth of their nature and of a Nature that will never be theirs.

Like Thoreau, too, Harrison observes nature not only with a believer's eye but with a painter's care and a scientist's precision; he carpenters his prose, building its constructions as a beaver might his dam (to invoke a favorite Harrison prop). His sentences, like Thoreau's, are sturdy and sound and sometimes sly. "I'm sure that Eulia made a practice of saving her soul by giving it up," he writes in a turn of phrase and paradox that almost reprises

Pico Iyer is a staff writer on world affairs for Time.



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the finest sentence of another Thoreauvian disciple writing about his master, Stanley Cavell: "One earns one's life by spending it; only so does one save it."

Most important, perhaps, in dedicating his novel to hero worship and turning Strang's life into art, Harrison is following firmly in the footsteps of the Sage of Walden, whose grand mission was to rehabilitate the very notion of heroism by making himself its central example. Strang consistently embodies both the theory and the practice of Thoreau: in his craggy self-definition and gruff self-sufficiency, in his catholic collection of natural scriptures and his refusal to keep purity and scatology apart, in his habits and his premises.

Most of the homespun homilies in the Gospel According to Strang are taken from the Noble Savage Handbook that Thoreau first translated into American: veils must be torn away, eyes must be opened, consciousness itself must be elevated and expanded. "The only true aristocracy," Strang likes to repeat, "is that of consciousness."

Yet Thoreau's greatest legacy to Harrison and the rest of America's unkempt and homeless anarchists may well be his gift for dropping out of society without dropping into chaos. Searching for foundations and first principles, all these wanderers have a fondness—a weakness, perhaps—for holy fools. They are, in a sense, rebels with a cause, fugitives for justice: their rebellion springs not from a contempt for reality but from a commitment to possibility. They hate puritans only because they cherish purity; they condemn educational institutions only because they care about learning.

Determined to cut through the "apparent contrast between intelligence and optimism," Harrison forgives the souls that society condemns, so long as some radiance still flickers within them: "This woman was known to be a bit of a drinker," begins Strang in a typical reminiscence, "but she once invited us [two children] into her house for a Coca-Cola and played the piano for us."

Though they are often devil-may-care outlaws, the rebels' imaginations fly on angels' wings. Though their social status may be low, their moral and esthetic standards are always high. Thus Harrison's shyness and his swagger—his willingness to write with a lump in his throat and a challenge in his eye—go hand in hand. Sure, the Harrison hero is prepared to brawl if innocence is compromised, but he's just as ready to sing lullabies to keep it intact. No, he does not stand on ceremony, but he maintains a touching respect for civility. Yes, he may sometimes seem a tough-talking roughneck whose love of women and indifference to etiquette betray an excess of animal high spirits, but he is also a purist of elevated habits and erudite tastes. In *Sundog*, he admires boys who quote Lorca and civil engineers who compose poems. He revels in Beethoven, quotes "the Danish malcontent and humpback Kierkegaard," discusses Saul Bellow and extols Agassiz's essay on the bluegill. Like his sporting buddy McGuane (who favors a Renaissance frame of reference and elaboration of syntax), he is partial to discretion and verbal decorum. Strang tenderly recalls brushing his sister's hair while she read to him from Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe*. And the narrator rejects David Bowie's "China Girl" in favor of "monks in cool, soundproof monasteries" singing Bach chorales.

Harrison is driven, then, by a quintessentially American openness of heart and innocence of spirit that enable him to glimpse and then to chase ideals. Yet that same simplicity often disqualifies him from assessing realities. For those who write in the American grain seem always to issue blessings more naturally, and more effectively, than curses. Perhaps it is because they belong to a society predicated on idealism. Perhaps because it is this young nation's prerogative to be liberated from the burdens of history and therefore exempt from its lessons. Perhaps because the country has its head in the clouds of pure abstraction where goodness works best, but evil lacks the complexity and concreteness that make it so strong. Whatever the reason, American literature excels, it seems, at the dizzy, tricky task of creating heroes, yet falters when it comes to creating villains. While Gary Gilmore, Billy the Kid, Charlie Starkweather, Jesse James and a hundred others are enshrined as models, it is hard indeed to think of an American Iago. The finest American writing specializes in the erection of ideals, not the execution of satire. Whitman, Miller, Shepard and the rest may hymn their country's greatness, but the dirty work of adroit and cutting social observation is best left to sophisticated aliens—Nabokov, perhaps, or Waugh.

Harrison fits this model all too well: the part of his writing that explores possibilities, scouting new ground and scanning the horizon, is irradiated with a remarkable glow; the part that would expose social shortcomings is callow, jejune. He has a boy's unguarded gentleness with his idols, but that same boy's unrefined coarseness around his enemies. Here, then, is a craftsman who takes fastidious pains to sketch exquisite pictures of harmony and idyll, yet resorts to condemning all oil men because of "their utter greed and the direct venality of their business," writing off all Congressmen as "a bilious clot of lawyers" and twice in eleven pages calling politicians "swine."

Worst of all, perhaps, Harrison's caricature of the cynical New York writer is broader than the Grand Canyon and cheaper than a bargain-basement trinket. This so-called sophisticate blithely condemns himself out of his own mouth, announcing, "I crave the topical, the ephemeral" and advertising his yearning for "an embittered career woman with whom to exchange caresses." He even goes so far as to declare, apropos of very little, "Even Boswell . . . would enjoy Zabar's, Manganaro's, the fey Dean & Deluca's" and, somewhat later, to voice a peculiarly unsympathetic form of homesickness: "I couldn't loiter at Dean & Deluca's, double-park in front of Zabar's, or stare in the window of Loebels." Would a man who found Dean & Deluca fey long for it? Would a man addicted to such pleasures find them fey? And would either type of man respond to Strang's wild irreverence? Suspending disbelief is not, I think, the best way to anatomize the real world.

Keeping his senses more about him than his wits, Harrison has little taste for argument, and no talent for it. But his miscalculations seem only typical of his breed. Unable to embrace the private world without reviling the public, Thoreau squandered much of his fathomless dignity when he took to railing crankily against the society he had so nobly transcended. Mailer, so electric and fresh when pursuing unorthodox theories, never seems more foolish than when flogging the dead horses of plastics or totalitarian architecture. Shepard, so transporting in his riffs, often remains transparent in his poses, coun-

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teracting the mystery of his drama with sulky complaints about his own success. Though the desperadoes' points are well taken, their polemics are often ill chosen.

Harrison also brings to mind those writers like Henry Miller and his spiritual descendant Charles Bukowski, who boast voices so strong and compelling that they can speak in no voice except their own. In *Sundog* he tries to disguise this by switching back and forth between the writer's narration, Strang's *apologia sua vita* and the narrator's taped diary. But all three blur into one indistinguishable sound, and characters develop no more than trees.

By the same token, Harrison's portrayal of women is terrible, even as his portrayal of a man's lustful, lyrical longing for a woman, driven by an avidity that is at once reproved and refined by tenderness, is wonderful. "We 'love' before we know how to protect ourselves, pure and simple," he writes. Beyond the pure and simple, Harrison himself often seems unprotected and lost.

More fundamentally, he has yet to find a way to fuse the two impulses he describes. All his books swing between gypsy narrative and tranquil meditation, adventure and reminiscence, Kerouac, in a sense, and Thoreau. In his first novel, *Wolf*, Harrison placed himself in the woods and there recalled his wanderings; in his next novel, *A Good Day to Die*, he drove cross-country while dreaming of the calmness of the woods. Now, in his sixth novel, he divides the two forces into two characters, seeker and sage, jaded skeptic and settled pundit—much as Shepard has begun to do in treating the conflict between the head's urge for adventure and the heart's longing for a home. But still he can find no unity. Harrison's novels are often hailed as "poet's novels," and that may well be their problem: they amount in effect to nothing more than generous anthologies of sweet visions, tingling epiphanies and lyrical tableaux. Since their highlights are still lifes, their climaxes are often stillborn. Sometimes they seem as serene, and as motionless, as the beautiful Zen-like paintings that grace their covers.

And yet, for all their lack of momentum, Harrison's novels are rarely unmoving, and there is no denying his strong, luminous—even numinous—talent. Such people, rough-handed yet softhearted, should supply the nation

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with its dreams. And with its elegies. For Harrison is an unusually heartfelt chronicler of loss and departure, of all those moments, endemic to adolescence, when the agent of our growth lights out, leaves town and takes away forever something of our hearts. Suddenly, in *Sundog*'s final rite of passage, all its limitations are swept away by force of sensibility alone. "There was an odor of lavender, her scent, and I felt congested as if I were about to cry," writes the narrator as the woman he longs for boards a bus heading south. But before the tears can come, there he is, in the book's closing paragraph, back in his element again, in flight: racing downstream with the current, hearing the cries of owls, listening for the baying of wolves, hurtling into the unknown, alive with all the fearful wonder of a boy on the move, not knowing whether he will ever come back home. □

Never Say 'After' Again

EDWARD ZUCKERMAN

WARDAY: And the Journey Onward. *By Whitley Strieber and James W. Kunetka. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 374 pp. $15.95.*

People who believe in civil defense hate Nevil Shute. A prolific and popular English writer, Shute's most enduring work is his 1957 novel, *On the Beach.* The book was a great commercial success. It replaced *Peyton Place* as the number one best seller in the country, was serialized in forty American newspapers, was made into a movie starring Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner and remains a steady seller in paperback. It is an affecting story about some people in Australia as they prepare to die. A nuclear war has come and gone, and southward-spreading radioactive fallout is slowly killing every living creature.

As a precondition for this tragedy, Shute stipulates that the world's powers have attacked one another with cobalt bombs, nuclear weapons doctored to produce an especially lethal variety of fallout. There was in fact some concern about the possible production of such weapons in the 1950s, but no cobalt bombs were ever built, for obvious reasons. "They would have no military usefulness," Edward Teller pointed out in a critique of *On the Beach*, titled "Off the Beach." A strong proponent of civil defense, Teller was dismayed by the popular impact of Shute's book: "This work of fiction has convinced multitudes that in the atomic age defense is useless."

Edward Zuckerman is the author of The Day After World War III, *a work of nonfiction, which has just been published by Viking.*

There has been little in nuclear war fiction, before or since, to lend support to those who believe that nuclear war is survivable and can be made more so by prudent preparation. In Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which has sold more than a million copies (mostly in paperback) since 1959, nuclear war ushers in a brutal and desolate Dark Age in which isolated monks preserve the few remnants of civilization that have escaped the great "Flame Deluge." In Russell Hoban's much praised *Riddley Walker* (1981), primitive tribespeople tell and retell the legend of the extinct civilization that was destroyed by "the Littl Shynin Man the Addom." Countless other science fiction novels and stories feature devastated landscapes populated by horrible postnuclear mutants.

Where are the novels that show that nuclear war is survivable? frustrated pro-civil-defense Representative Donald Mitchell demanded at a 1976 Congressional hearing. "What is the novel—I suppose a movie's been made of it—that starts the day after the bomb is dropped?"

That was *On the Beach*, and it probably wasn't the kind of book Mitchell was looking for, a witness replied. "They have fearful scenes in that," he explained. "At the conclusion everybody dies."

"That's not going to serve our purposes then," Mitchell said. "We'll have to have a sequel there to amend it."

"Yes," agreed the witness, "so that everybody lives."

That sequel has yet to be written. If it ever is, Federal civil defense researcher Conrad Chester told the hearing, it will be realistic. With target-area evacuation and the construction of expedient fallout shelters, Chester testified, "It is theoretically possible to have a large nuclear war with no near-term civilian fatalities." In practice, he acknowledged, there would be some deaths because some people would be "too uninformed, lazy or stupid to evacuate and construct shelter." Chester and his ilk were frustrated again in 1982 by the popularity of *The Fate of the Earth*, Jonathan Schell's meditation on human extinction. This end-of-the-worldism drives the civil defenseniks crazy. "Nuclear Pollution" was the headline the *Journal of Civil Defense* put over a joint review of *The Fate of the Earth* and *On the Beach.*

Now, for the first time in years, a novel about nuclear war is on the best-seller lists. *Warday*, by Whitley Strieber and James W. Kunetka, is intended as yet another argument that nuclear war is bad and we shouldn't have one, but along the way it throws some scraps to the nuclear-war-is-survivable crowd. Like the television movie *The Day After*, *Warday* depicts the postnuclear-war world as a place where nobody in his right mind would choose to live, but (again like *The Day After*) it depicts that world as a place where people can and *do* live.

Among successful nuclear war novels, *Warday* most resembles Pat Frank's 1959 *Alas, Babylon*, which describes life in a small Florida town that happens to avoid being hit by either bombs or fallout in a major nuclear war. ("Lucky east wind," remarks the protagonist.) Life is hard in the town of Fort Repose, but life goes on. People bury their dead, forage for food, partake in an elaborate system of barter, organize an efficient squad of vigilantes, get hungry, lose weight, develop character and muddle through. Looking to the long term, the town doctor excitedly announces to friends one afternoon, "I have just delivered my first post-Day baby! [In *Alas, Babylon*, the day of the war is referred to afterward as The Day; in *Warday*, it is Warday.] A boy, about eight pounds, bright and healthy! . . . Now we know that there's going to be a human race."

Warday is more realistic than *Alas, Babylon*: it offers no inexplicable sanctuaries from fallout. But, as in Fort Repose, life goes on in the *Warday* world. And there would be more of it to go on if we had had more civil defense, the book attests offhandedly. We are told of a woman who was "one of the few people in the United States who had a bomb

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shelter . . . so even though Cleveland got a dusting [of fallout] from the Dakota strikes, she was not affected."

The nuclear war of *Warday* is a limited one. Soviet missiles land on New York, Washington, San Antonio and the missile fields of Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas. The American response is proportionate, and the war comes to an abrupt halt as the explosions' electromagnetic pulse disrupts American and Soviet military communications. (In real life the American military is busily engaged in shielding its equipment against such bursts; according to *Warday*, the shielding can easily be overwhelmed.) The West Coast of America, upwind of all the explosions, emerges from the war unscathed. Elsewhere, 7 million people are killed by the bombs; over the next few years 17 million more die of radiation-linked illnesses and 50 million die of other war-related causes, including famine and a flu epidemic. Still, most Americans survive. The country has broken up into quasi-independent states, many of them reduced to semicolonial dependence on Great Britain or Japan, but society functions. Five years after the war, HBO is about to come back on the air, a new Apple computer is available in limited quantities and Meryl Streep has defied the authoritarian government of California by producing and acting in a banned play. Most important, the good old American spirit has not been crushed. The country "is a great mass of haunting images . . . of people who keep on even when they ought to be unable," says one of the book's narrators. "I was affected by smiles. Before the war there were never such smiles. They can shatter you, the smiles of the Americans."

All this has brought down on *Warday* the criticism of those who do not find its postwar world as unrelievedly terminal as they like their postnuclear-war worlds to be. The book is "survival-oriented," complained a member of a Presbyterian "Peacemaking Ministry" in a letter to *Nuclear Times*. "The main criticism of the book has come from the left, unfortunately," says Strieber (the author of four horror novels). He and Kunetka (author of nonfiction books about J. Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project) agree, Strieber says, that

> if the conclusion of the book is, "we're going to survive a nuclear war," the book has failed. The conclusion is *supposed* to be that even the most limited nuclear war is completely unacceptable. . . . Once the peace movement takes the position that any nuclear war will be the end of the world, that leaves the rest of the field open to President Reagan and his people. They can prove that the application of weapons they envision [in a limited nuclear war] will not bring on "nuclear winter" or the end of the world. Unless we address that kind of war, the peace movement tacitly implies that it finds that kind of war acceptable.

The peace movement would probably argue with that, but Strieber's main point is correct. A nuclear war need not be the end of the world to be an inconceivable horror. Why insist that any nuclear war will be the end of the world when that's not necessarily so, and when it *need* not be so to make a compelling case against the dangerous nuclear buildup of recent American Administrations?

So, on that score, *Warday* is fine. HBO may go back on the air afterward, but that doesn't make having a nuclear war a good idea. The problem with *Warday* is that it isn't much of a novel. It convincingly evokes a postnuclear-war world, but it is handicapped by not having a plot. Our narrators, "Whitley Strieber" and "James Kunetka," journey around the country (on Amtrak, which is running fine) five years after the war and report on what they see in documentary fashion. The book is a scrapbook of transcribed "interviews"—with a British medical relief officer, an anarchist terrorist, the Foreign Minister of a breakaway Chicano nation-state in the Southwest and so forth—interspersed with documents from postattack bureaucracies. Whenever some narrative action threatens to raise its head, Strieber and Kunetka slap it down. At one point they are arrested and sentenced to prison for violating California's exclusionary immigration laws. They decide to escape. One page later they pop out of a conveniently loose hatch in a prison bus. Then it's on to the next document.

As the narrators' journey runs on, one of them wonders "what will become of this new book. These days it is not easy to gain publication, and the distribution of books is a difficult process." The real-life Strieber and Kunetka neatly solved this problem by publishing the book *before* the war. *Warday* is a modern publishing phenomenon, a book that earned its authors more than half a million dollars (for hard-cover, book club and movie rights) before a single copy was sold. It has been massively promoted by its publisher. After a dozen weeks, it seems to be dropping a bit on the best-seller lists—certainly sooner than hoped for—but paperback rights were recently sold for $852,000.

Clearly, this is a book that has benefited from recent headlines. (If it had been published in 1974, say, it would have been consigned to the science fiction ghetto and sold 6,000 copies.) The last great outpouring—and still the golden age—of nuclear war fiction ran from 1957 to 1963, when there was widespread public concern about fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests. In 1963 the testing went underground and nuclear war more or less dropped out of sight as a public issue for almost twenty years. That nuclear war fiction is beginning to appear once again is a sign of dangerous times. □

THE MARE

I remember the shade where I found her
spent and bruised like the fallen apples.
Like them she was full of darkness.
Full of the sweetness which rushes upon us
so soon after death.
She lay there like a mummy,
like the wreckage of an ancient queen,
mild, yet locked away within herself.
It held me the long afternoon—
the secret fruit, the silken mare—
until the day had passed.
I stood and walked among the goats
with their delicate steps
and fed them apples
so mellow
they burst like hearts before the queen and me.

Henri Cole

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Bitches and Witches

KATHA POLLITT

THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK. *By John Updike. Alfred A. Knopf. 307 pp. $15.95.*

After one of my male friends praised *The Witches of Eastwick* for its uncanny understanding of what it feels like to be a woman, I promised myself I wouldn't review it. Life is short, after all, and I was sure reviewers would be lining up to pan this silly and patronizing fable of New England divorcées who find liberation in sorcery. So far, though, critics have been deferential, with women, interestingly, making some of the deepest salaams. What are we coming to when Margaret Atwood, Canada's answer to Marilyn French, is less able to confront Updike's views of women than *Newsweek*'s Peter Prescott, who supports barring females from the Century Club?

"The word 'backlash' will be spoken," says Atwood in *The New York Times Book Review*, and perhaps backlash is not such a bad explanation for the book's reception. The Big Name phenomenon may be a better one. Like Saul Bellow, Renata Adler and a few others, Updike could publish his grocery lists and win accolades for terseness and domestic realism. Then, too, there's the oddly ambivalent tone of the novel itself: it tap dances so rapidly between sermonizing and archness that one risks looking hopelessly flat-footed for suggesting it might mean something. Come on, ladies, Updike seems to be saying in his jacket photo (eyes rolled heavenward, hand slapping cheek, puckish smile), it's just a *joke*. Tell that to Dr. Freud, say I.

To sum up briefly. The witches of Eastwick, a scruffily fashionable seaside town in Rhode Island, are Alexandra, Jane and Sukie, who have recently discarded their dull, dutiful husbands under the influence of pop feminism ("female yearning was in all the papers and magazines now"—we are in the late 1960s). Worldly, restless, a little bitter, they neglect their children, sleep with married men (including, before the novel begins, one another's husbands) and take up artsy part-time employment—overweight Lexa makes cute clay figurines of fat women, her "bubbies," which she sells in the local gifte shoppes; intense Jane gives piano lessons and plays the cello; sexy Sukie writes a gossip column for the local paper. Their true art, though, is the black one: every Thursday evening they meet to nibble hors d'oeuvres and sorcerize their neighbors by raising "the infrangible triangle, the cone of power."

At first it all seems harmless enough. True, Sukie has turned her husband into a plastic placemat, but he was an insufferable bore, always braying about "uppity women," so for my money he had it coming. I cheered, too, when Lexa summoned up a sudden storm to clear the beach of the bronzed youths who call her a hag: "One's inner weather always bore a relation to the outer; it was simply a question of reversing the current, which occurred rather easily once power had been assigned to the primary pole, oneself as a woman. So many of Alexandra's remarkable powers had flowed from this mere reappropriation of her assigned self, achieved not until midlife." Surely spells that chase away radio-playing louts are a force for good?

Apparently not. Although the witches may buck up their spirits with feminist clichés ("Men aren't the answer, isn't that what we've decided?"), for Updike, as for Sukie's ex, sisterhood is strictly for women who don't have dates. Darryl Van Horne, a mysterious, dark, hairy stranger, moves into the old Lenox mansion and before you can say Old Nick, all hell breaks loose. The witches redouble their child-neglect to soak in his hot tub, smoke pot and vie for his curiously cold semen. Egged on by Van Horne, they discard old lovers for new ones and take on projects miles above their modest abilities. Lexa slaves over wretched imitations of Nikki de Saint-Phalle (Van Horne collects pop art); Jane abases herself, in worship and rage, before the quintessential maleness of Bach ("So this was the immortality men had built their pyramids and rendered their blood sacrifice for"); Sukie, who can barely write a grammatical sentence, starts a novel.

Sexual rivalry adds a new viciousness to the witches' hexes: four people die, all horribly. God knows where it would all have ended for the good Christians of Eastwick—Brenda, their Unitarian minister, is no Cotton Mather—had Van Horne not decamped with his homosexual lover. (There's a joke in there somewhere at the expense of female sexual vanity.) What's a poor girl to do? Tired of their tight budgets and barely on speaking terms, the witches use the last of their powers to summon up . . . a new set of husbands! Very funny.

Updike's prose has never been more Updikean—radiant and supremely confident if you like him, unctuous and preening if you don't. Some of the set pieces are splendid: elegiac descriptions of seasons turning, the raucous guest sermon Van Horne gives at Brenda's church, focusing on such aspects of the divine plan as the intestinal roundworm ("Couldn't you have done better, given the resources? I sure as hell could have. So vote for me next time, O.K.? Amen"). Others are self-satisfied and smug: "How magnificent and abysmal pebbles are!" There's a dusting of shrewd epigrams ("Being a divorcée in a small town is a little like playing Monopoly: eventually you land on all the properties") and, as always with Updike, a wealth of wonderfully exact details of exurban life (boutiques named The Yapping Fox and The Hungry Sheep, Jane's split-level house, carefully "antiqued" by its former owner down to the oak toilet seat).

Updike clearly had fun finding modern applications for ancient lore. Van Horne's things are monogrammed "M"; the witches, whose reading is limited to magazines and formula romances, are apt to fumble their Hebraio-Latin abracadabras. But what is going on here? It would be priggish to insist that the execution of vast numbers of women as witches should constrain a modern writer from using witchcraft as a springboard for whimsy, although I wonder if we'd be so quick to welcome a novel in which, say, Jews really did kill Christian babies, even if the author assured us they had been sorely provoked by their Christian neighbors and the infants were singularly unattractive. But history aside, woman as witch, joined through her reproductive powers to the mysterious forces of nature, is just the flattering way of saying women are their wombs—and that is a pretty sexist idea. There it is, the dreaded, flat-footed word.

I don't mean Updike dislikes his heroines. On the contrary, he lavishes af-

Katha Pollitt is on leave as literary editor of The Nation.

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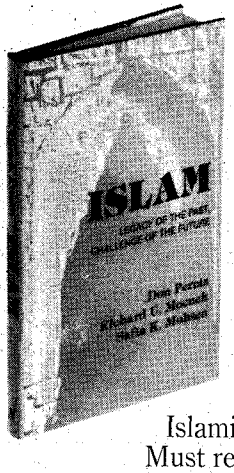

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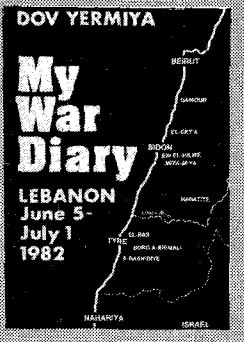

MY WAR DIARY
Lebanon: June 5-July 1, 1982
Dov Yermiya

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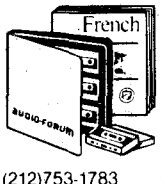

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fection on them—endlessly detailing their physical charms, sympathetically recounting their worries about aging and spreading hips and loneliness—but only insofar as they are helpless. "Do you think any of us will ever have any more babies?" wails Sukie; it's the only cry from her heart we hear. Toward their attempts at independence he's mean-spirited: their new ideas come straight from the Sunday papers, and it turns out that the placemat pays alimony. Toward their only real power, the blind superfecundity of nature, he is ultimately, as befits a good Christian, hostile. Nature is beautiful, but it kills; the witches are beautiful, but their magic can only be frivolous or spiteful. How is it that Lexa can make an old lady take a serious fall for pressing a dull invitation but can't turn her kids' endless spaghetti dinners into steak, or get herself the fancy gallery Van Horne promises her? It's because women's power is sex, which, allowed to run wild, destroys, just as nature run wild becomes the cancer that is one of the novel's controlling metaphors.

Updike has said in an interview that he would like to try life as a woman (as long as he could return to being a man—no fool he!), and he has been praised by Diane Johnson for successfully imagining himself into female skin. His women's internal monologues, though, made me think of those transsexuals who talk about how they always felt "like a woman." Women don't feel "like" women; they are women. Updike's heroines are as obsessed with their femaleness as, well, Updike. Sukie can't pee without comparing male and female urinating styles: "Everything about them was more direct, their insides weren't the maze women's were, for the pee to find its way through." Spaghetti sauce strikes Lexa as "sadly menstrual," the spaghetti itself as "her own white fat." Their sexuality is Freud's old compound of vanity and masochism. They poach other women's husbands but, interestingly, in the two big adulterous sex scenes, neither woman has an orgasm. Surely a witch ought to be able to conjure *those* up! More exciting are their humiliations at the horn of Van Horne ("When he fucked you it hurt"), and why not? "Most of the good things that come to a woman come through pain," thinks Jane, aching "at both ends of her perineum" from that afternoon's session at the manse. I'm sure there are women in the

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world who fit this profile; but as a universal, which is how it's intended, it's a male fantasy, as Bech's "Jewish" awe of the American countryside is a gentile fantasy.

If Updike's view of women is the ancient misogynistic one—women are promiscuous, amoral, treacherous and a powerful force for ill (the notion that they are passive and weak is much more modern)—his view of men is all the New Sensitivity. He throws in a few references to the Vietnam War, a decidedly male endeavor, but it would be wrong to make too much of that. The witches do as much damage in their limited sphere as is humanly, or superhumanly, possible, and they are no peaceniks either. The war aside, the faults of men are women's fault. If they're bitter and played out, like Sukie's alcoholic older lover, it's because of their nagging, hyperactive wives; if they're unfaithful, it's because unscrupulous women tempt them. And maybe the war is women's fault, too. The witches, at any rate, firmly believe that men are permanently furious at women's ability to bear children, just as Dustin Hoffman said in the interviews about *Tootsie*. But that idea may be just one of Updike's many jokes at the expense of female vanity.

It's true that the Eastwick witches are far more lively and vital than any of their men, but the reason Updike finally gives for that is no compliment to women. Why, after all, were those husbands they ditched so boring and tired and narrow-minded? Because they had to work to support their wives! Not by the dilettantish dabbling with which their exes supplement alimony payments but by the hard, bone-wearying work of the world: "How docilely they scrape their whiskers off their faces every day and go out in the world looking for money." Never mind the facts—that most married women not only work but do all the housework, that most divorced women receive no child support. For Updike, work is, by definition, what men do. What they achieve, whether they're Bach or Lexa's husband, who "had known all about chrome," is the result of a conscious will to mastery. What women achieve, when it isn't precious little, is performed by magic. The "inner boiling" of the Eastwick witches "had in other cloistral towns produced Emily Dickinson's verses and Emily Brontë's inspired novel." (One recalls in this connection that words like "magic" and "witchery" bestrew Updike's reviews of women writers—see his essays on Muriel Spark—and that he likes to lump wildly different women writers together in reviews as though women were all alike, pairing, for example, the superbly accomplished Ruth Prawer Jhabvala with the talented novice Cathleen Schine.)

In her provocative 1978 essay "Why Do These Men Hate Women?" Vivian Gornick contrasts the complex, fully realized heroines of the great nineteenth-century European male novelists with the monstrous moms, sex toys and doormats produced by their contemporary American brothers. She might have commented, too, on how strange it was that the changes in sex roles vigorously under way throughout the 1960s and 1970s were hardly mentioned in the novels of Bellow, Roth, Mailer, Updike and other major male novelists. Since Gornick's essay was published, most of those men have made a nod in the direction of modernity, though perhaps a furious headshake would be a more accurate characterization: think of the female limousine driver in storm-trooper boots who witnesses Nathan Zuckerman's graveside hysterics in Roth's *The Anatomy Lesson*, or the licentious harridans who populate Isaac Bashevis Singer's most recent novel, *The Penitent*. Our celebrated writers just don't get the point, even when they try, or think they try, as I suppose Updike thinks he has.

And so it goes, from Portnoy's complaisant Monkey to Zuckerman's driver in Nazi regalia; from the bitches of *Couples* to the witches of Eastwick. Not much progress, when you think about it. □

Greener Pastures

KIRKPATRICK SALE

GREEN POLITICS: The Global Promise. *By Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak. E.P. Dutton. 244 pp. $11.95.*

There's nothing like an election year to demonstrate the emptiness of American political life. It takes only a sober look at the sorry bunch of candidates the system has come up with this year to make one stand open-jawed in amazement at the sterility of the American party machinery. And to hear their vapid talk, their exquisite vacuity of ideas in a world of unabating and catastrophic crises is to appreciate the complete triumph of the lowest common denominator—in ideas, as in beer, only the most insipid and watery are fit for national distribution.

The need for a serious, workable and desirable alternative has obviously never been greater. With the publication of this book, such an alternative is presented to America at last. It is, as readers of this magazine will know [see Charlene Spretnak, "A Green Party—It *Can* Happen Here," April 21], that mixture of ecological sensitivity, nonviolent activism, participatory democracy and economic decentralism known as Green politics.

I do not want to claim too much for this book. It is not an easy read. It lacks spark, as one might expect from a treatise written by an Austrian physicist and a feminist scholar. It lapses now and again into a hectoring and somewhat superior tone, especially ill becoming those who are just starting to explore these waters. And in the crucial section on American Greenery it lacks the intimacy and weight of close-up reporting. (It also, unaccountably, lacks an index.)

But I do believe that if this book is not widely read and absorbed and ultimately translated into some sort of American Green movement, there is nothing left for our future but the continuing onrush of the four horsemen of the modern apocalypse: toxic pollution, resource exhaustion, nuclear war and planetary death.

Green Politics is most valuable for its clear and sensitive warts-and-all portrait of the Green movement in West Germany, drawn from interviews, behind-the-scenes observation and sympathetic but honest reporting. It illuminates several important but usually misunderstood points.

First, there is much more to the movement than the Green Party created

Kirkpatrick Sale, author of SDS, Power Shift *and* Human Scale, *is a member of the coordinating council of the North American Bioregional Congress and secretary of the American E.F. Schumacher Society. He is writing a book on bioregional politics.*

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in 1979 and much more to the party than the twenty-seven eye-catching people in its parliamentary *Fraktion*. The parliamentary tip of the iceberg is useful for the movement and may even influence some legislation, but the Greens' real importance lies in their strength with local and regional constituencies across the country. The recent defection of Gert Bastian from the parliamentary group and the much-reported turmoil surrounding the *Fraktion*'s installation of an all-woman leadership say much less about the state of Green politics than does the party's impressive 33 percent increase in the Baden-Württemberg state election in March. And even that does not reflect the widespread sympathy the polls find among West Germans for many of the Greens' ideas and positions.

Second, the influence of former sectarian Marxists among the Greens is neither so extensive nor so insidious as certain establishment commentators suggest. The Marxists have shown considerable organizing ability and political acuity, but their numbers are small, their positions secondary and their activities directed toward the constructive goal of keeping the movement to "hard" analysis rather than "soft" stargazing. The Green movement is an amalgam of many groups from all parts of the political spectrum (even conservatives); there is no more danger that the Marxists will "dominate" than that the vegetarians or feminists or confrontationists will.

Finally, the programs and ideas of the Greens go far beyond the anti-nuclear and environmental activism for which they are most noted in the United States. They represent, in an organized form, many of the values that have emerged as the basic stock of "new age" politics: decentralism, feminism, participatory democracy, social ecology, regionalism, workplace democracy, nonviolence, spirituality. The party is opposed on principle to the nation-state and actively promotes regional autonomy and cultural separatism, ultimately working for "a Europe of the regions." And its ecological analysis includes a four-square attack on the industrial system and the growth economy that stand behind both environmental devastation and militarism—"We cannot get rid of the tanks unless we are ready to get rid of the cars," as theorist Rudolf Bahro has put it—a position that has not found favor with the unions, the Social Democrats or the Marxists in the Greens' own ranks.

Green Politics also confronts, albeit somewhat skimpily—thirty-two pages—the question in the mind of any American reader: Can it happen here? The authors respond with a ringing affirmative, though appropriately they are more cautious about the "will" than the "can."

Grounds for optimism do exist. Green politics is in the American grain of self-determination, decentralism, self-sufficiency, town-meeting democracy, pluralism, suspicion of authority and love of wilderness. It is exactly the sort of politics that could unite the several movements—ecology, anti-nuclear, feminist, alternative-technology, counterculture, holistic-health—that have descended from the 1960s with two decades of battle-scarred experience behind them. (Capra and Spretnak say there are "literally thousands of groups and periodicals" in the United States that are Green-oriented and, in one appendix, identify one hundred of them.) And it has already taken nascent form in the several dozen "bioregional" groups that have emerged across the country in the last few years and that gathered for the first continental bioregional congress in May.

Moreover, the body of thought and experimentation from which an American Green movement could draw is perhaps unequalled anywhere in the world, though Capra and Spretnak discuss it only sketchily. It includes, in the philosophical penumbra, the works of Lewis Mumford, Ralph Borsodi, Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman, Hazel Henderson, Wendell Berry, Leopold Kohr and Murray Bookchin; and in the practical umbra, Frances Moore Lappé on food, E.F. Schumacher on alternative technology, Amory and Hunter Lovins on soft energy, John Friedmann on regional development, Herman Daly on steady-state economics, Richard Merrill on agriculture, John and Nancy Todd on bioshelters, Raymond Dasmann on regional ecology. And that barely scratches the surface.

Yet for all the promise, Capra and Spretnak show that plenty of difficulties must be overcome before Green politics can make a significant and lasting impact on American life. There is, to begin with, a popular resistance to change and an acceptance of officialdom and the status quo. That often combines with what psychologists call cognitive dissonance, the ability to hold two mutually exclusive beliefs at the same time, resulting in a zombied paralysis that is often mistaken for apathy. There is also the powerful hold of existing institutions—cultural, journalistic, educational, political—that define both current reality and a narrow range of options for change. Green notions such as replacing nuclear deterrence with "social defense" (nonviolent resistance and neighborhood-based civil defense) and decentralizing national corporations into community-owned industries don't have much chance to be formulated and discussed, let alone enacted, in a world defined by *The New York Times* and the U.S. Congress.

Then, too, the great differences between West Germany and the United States make any simple importation of the experience of *die Grünen* impossible. West Germany has about a quarter of the population of the U.S. and covers an area no bigger than Oregon. It has a firm tradition of regional identity and strong regional and local governments. It has been exposed to and even governed by a social democratic party for many years, and the ideas of the left are not foreign. Above all, its political spectrum has generally been a great deal broader and its system allows a variety of minority parties to establish and maintain themselves. In West Germany the proportional representation system gives any party getting 5 percent of the vote a place in the Bundestag; the American winner-take-all system denies third parties representation. Moreover, in Germany the Federal government pays roughly $1.40 per vote to nationwide parties even if they fall under the 5 percent line, which enabled the Greens to collect $1.3 million after their first electoral venture in 1979 and $3.2 million after their latest campaign in 1983.

Although the obstacles to a Green movement in America are considerable, as Capra and Spretnak say, "the matter at hand is survival." As evidence accumulates about the ecological Armageddon that both major parties are preparing for us, it is not necessarily fanciful to imagine that a Green alternative could be enunciated, broadcast and seriously debated in the months to come. Someday—if there is a someday—we may be able to look back and remember this book as the one that launched Green politics in America and made that someday possible. □

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The Home Front

D.D. GUTTENPLAN

A SEASON OF SPOILS. *By Jonathan Lash, Katherine Gillman and David Sheridan. Pantheon. 385 pp. $21.95. Paper $9.95.* Is Ronald Reagan completely without shame? Of course not. After all, he did get rid of James Watt, former boss of Anne Burford (also removed), who was herself the boss of Rita Lavelle (*vide supra*). Lavelle, a onetime flack for a California chemical company, was recommended by Ed Meese for the job of supervising the cleanup of toxic waste dumps, like the one created by her former employer. A woman of parts (large), she outlined her first objective at the E.P.A. (on notepaper headed "I'd rather be playing tennis"): "Change perception of Love Canal from dangerous to benign." Her staff called her Piggy behind her back.

Except for the nickname, it's all in *A Season of Spoils*, a slightly long-winded but impressively researched look at the Reagan Administration's disastrous environmental policies. With budgets for E.P.A. enforcement and research already gutted and industrial polluters still calling the shots (Remember how William Ruckelshaus was going to get tough on acid rain?), you may wonder how much worse things could get in a second term. Lash and Co. have the answer, and it ain't pretty to think about. Crazy Eddie in charge of oil leasing? He'd be a natural. His prices are so low, he's practically giving the country away . . .

RETREAT FROM SAFETY. *By Joan Claybrook and the staff of Public Citizen. Pantheon. 270 pp. Paper $8.95.* If the Democrats ever get past arguing about whose commitment to Israeli sovereignty, Honduran "democracy" or full (i.e. partial) employment is stronger, they might find *Retreat From Safety* useful. The book takes eight policy areas—infant formula, food and nutrition, drugs (therapeutic, not recreational), product safety, worker safety, environmental protection, transportation safety and energy—and shows how the various government departments charged with protecting us have undergone Orwellian transformations. The quality of our air, the purity of our water and the wholesomeness of our food are all suffering as the Reagan Administration replaces regulation with public relations.

Retreat From Safety depicts the unpleasant and unacceptable face of Reaganomics through interviews, documents and incisive analyses. It also answers the question, Who's minding the store? Apparently it's still David (Trojan) Stockman, who has consistently used O.M.B. authority to hobble existing regulations while shooting down new ones before they can get off the ground. Speaking of Stockman, *Retreat From Safety*'s mix of facts, figures and colorful case histories (without any real challenge to liberal capitalism) would make it a handy briefing book for Presidential contenders debating domestic policy. As long as William Casey doesn't get a copy. Or was it Baker?

FAT OF THE LAND. *By Fred Powledge. Simon & Schuster. 287 pp. $15.95.* This book really ought to be called *A Tomato Lover's Lament*. Powledge aims to expose the waste, fraud and sugar-coated chicanery rampant in the American food industry, but somewhere between soup and nuts he loses his way. Powledge's account of food wholesalers, supermarket psychologists and asleep-at-the-switch Federal regulators is alarmingly convincing, and his outrage at the middlemen who siphon off 70 cents of every food dollar tries hard to be a call to arms.

Too often, though, *Fat of the Land* reads like one of those U.S.D.A. pamphlets on Helpful Hints for Homemakers. Poor organization, frequent repetition, a preachy tone and an excessively coy use of the first person make this book lean reading. Powledge seems to get angry only at the inventors of those "hard ripened" tomatoes designed to be picked by machine. His superficial treatment of farm labor is made more annoying by his gee-whizzery in contemplating the fruits (and vegetables) of that labor. He scores advertisers for trying to con us into believing that food is fun. But food *is* fun, though Powledge's deadpan, and admiring, description of an interviewee's lunch—"a baked sweet potato without butter, salt, or Kraft Miniature Marshmallows"—makes you wonder if the

D.D. Guttenplan is a writer who lives in New York City.

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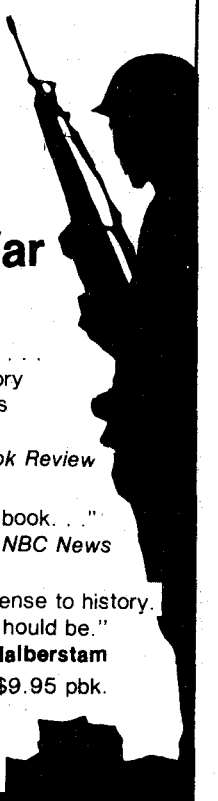

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man has ever handled a Whopper, or dared to eat a quiche.

MODERN MEAT. *By Orville Schell. Random House. 337 pp. $17.95.* No such mortification of the flesh for Orville Schell. "After I first began traveling around the country to learn about meat, I decided that wherever possible I would try to dine on the specific animal I was investigating." A hog farmer when he's not writing books, Schell ingests everything from "Farm Fresh Sausage" (made in a factory) to plastic hay while pursuing his picaresque of the palate. His account of the ways in which technology affects the meat we eat is scary enough to make most readers consider renouncing the fleshpot. Schell reports overwhelming evidence that the continued use of antibiotics in animal feed may build resistance to drugs like tetracycline, streptomycin and ampicillin in humans who eat meat. The result would be a world where dysentery, meningitis and other diseases rage out of control—all for the sake of slightly cheaper sirloin.

Schell's explanation of how bacteria become drug-resistant is a model of clarity without condescension. His discussion of artificial animal feeds and hormone manipulation, though less dramatic, makes an eloquent case for asking How's the Beef? instead of just wondering whose burger is bigger. Chickens are given short shrift, but in all other respects *Modern Meat* is that rare thing, a muckraking book with a sense of humor—written by a man who is willing to put his meatloaf where his mouth is. □

Busman's Holiday

BRIGITTE WEEKS

When a book review editor is asked what she takes to read on vacation, an age-old question arises: To lie or not to lie?

I gave this matter some serious moral scrutiny. Yes, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, surrounded by Proust and garnished with an obscure—but classy—early twentieth-century British novelist, say Arnold Bennett, jumps to the forked tongue. A book review editor, after all, has discriminating taste, is always stretching her horizons. She is, in fact, a veritable hybrid of George Eliot, Iris Murdoch and Alexis de Tocqueville.

The facts? Ah yes, those facts. I did take a trip to Mexico last month and did actually carry with me three books, all paperbacks. First on this list of true confessions—the truth will out—must come the Candlelight (or was it Serenade?) Romance. I don't remember the title, the plot or even the brand name, but as my plane flew through a violent thunderstorm on the way to Mexico City late one Friday night, the sinewy chest and polished Hessians (why don't they ever wear plain old boots?) of the good Lord Ravenswood were all that stood between me and death by fear of flying. I cannot bring myself to shut the gallant gentleman up in a closet. To me he's a real hero.

From thin to thick, 800 pages thick. Gay Courter's saga of turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro and the Confederate exiles, *River of Dreams*, seemed somehow Latin and inviting. *Book World* had already expressed its institutional enjoyment in a review, so I was off the judgment hook—a hook that is hard to evade. A little too much agony, insanity and childbirth, I decided, but lots of interesting information about trading, pioneering and growing coffee, not to mention a quick course in how to manufacture dynamite.

Only one volume was left now in the suitcase and the fear of withdrawal flickered. A book junkie *cannot* be totally without a book, any book, in a language she can read, and by then I was deep in the Mexican mountains. I had left *I'm Not Complaining* by Ruth Adam until last. This was a substantial crisp volume in the serious black binding of the Virago Modern Classics. I had snatched it up in blind faith, not even glancing at the jacket copy. Virago has almost never let me down, and this time was no exception. This tale of a British schoolteacher in the 1930s was everything I could hope for: funny, evocative, well written, memorable and, in the true sense, escapist—someone else's problems, *faux pas* and triumphs in another era and in another country. It was gone too soon.

Lying by now on Pacific sands, I was in deep trouble. Major miscalculation. No books left. But maybe book addicts do have a guardian angel, for there in the hotel office was lying, abandoned, a

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battered Dick Francis. For me, it could have been any one of his titles; they all bear rereading. It was, in fact, *Trial Run*, full of British princes and skulduggery at the Moscow Olympic Games. I devoured it.

Now, for my next vacation, I'm putting aside *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and then there's still Proust . . .

Brigitte Weeks is the editor of The Washington Post Book World.

GEOFFREY STOKES

The road to indolence and yet another paperback thriller (current faves: Robert Barnard and Michael Z. Lewin) is paved with good intentions. I recall with embarrassment the summer Edmund Wilson somehow turned into Dick Francis—Wilson's own fault, really; "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" was so suggestive I felt positively obliged to do a little research—and recall with pleasure the Cape Cod library in which the later novels of Henry James became the early ones of Margery Allingham. With years of experience like this behind him, a prudent (i.e. intellectually slothful) person might reasonably be expected to lower his sights a little, but I haven't done so for a couple of reasons. First, I'm afraid the down-sloping pattern might repeat itself anyway; that if I started with Margery Allingham, I'd wind up with James Michener or Norman Podhoretz. Second, I've already planned a summer of medical and statistical readings.

In the medical category, I anticipate often and sometimes passionately consulting Dr. Spock's revised and updated *Baby and Child Care*. This is because I will be revising and updating my parenthood sometime along about the first of July, and shortly thereafter—probably at 3 o'clock in the morning—there will come a time when a few words of reassurance from the good doctor will be necessary. And he is a good doctor, too: clear, succinct and (as soon as I find the light switch and my glasses) available for house calls. I'll be doing some reading of theory as well—T. Berry Brazelton, mostly—but such books will be consulted in daylight and read in linear fashion. Spock gets gulped, index first, in two- or three-page clumps.

My summer statistical research will also be conducted in search of specifics, and the two basic texts—*The Sporting News Official Baseball Register* and Bill James's *Baseball Abstract*—are already strategically located near the television. Now if only the *Sporting News* people would add a GIDP column.

Geoffrey Stokes is a frequent contributor to the Voice Literary Supplement.

HELEN DUDAR

Listen, the secret of rewarding vacation reading is an unbalanced diet: one junk-food book for every three or four nourishing items. Junk-food books are the equivalent of Drake's Devil Dogs, the sort of thing you hope your kids won't get hooked on. Celebrity memoirs are junk food and so are most costume novels and practically all spy stories, except those by John le Carré. An ideal junk-food book combines stylistic banality with textual simplemindedness, thereby delivering a speedy read in the lull between showering and dinner.

Having noted this, I confess that just now I find the fiction pickings slim. Oh, there's no dearth of trash—this year's Robert Ludlum, any year's Harold Robbins—but when you write about publishing, as I do, you get to read a lot of pop fiction for work and you can O.D. on the genre.

So instead of fiction, this year I'm concentrating on *true* life. I can't wait to get at Joan Collins's *Past Imperfect*. Although movie star autobiographies are never as juicy as I have been led to expect, they take me back to a more innocent time when I thought fan magazines could teach me life's secrets. My book bag will also carry Anthony West's report on his wonderful father, H.G. Wells, and his terrible mother, Rebecca West. The book is, I understand, a serious undertaking, but the fact is I will read it as I read the Collins: for the sake of lubricity, for the gossip.

Time for stuff like this is one benefit of a month spent at a foreign resort without television and with no social life to speak of. You can't imagine how much reading can be done if you're not trotting off for drinks at a friend's garden every afternoon.

For some years, I consumed one fat late Dickens every holiday—*Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*. It was wonderful, a relaxed wallow with novels I had theretofore neglected. It also made me feel smug and virtuous. Then I set to work on the Palliser novels, but political Trollope wearied me. On the recommendation of a friend who swears I will love it, the big project this year is Paul Scott's *The Raj Quartet*. Four sizable novels on India should see me through half the vacation.

I saved Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* for the summer because I suspect it falls in the category of widely unread best sellers. When a book lingers for months on the list and nobody I know talks about it, I assume that people, finding the way thorny, aren't getting very far and that it needs the steady concentration provided by leisurely uninterrupted days.

In addition, I expect to have an early copy of the new Joseph Heller novel, *God Knows*, and I'm taking the one-volume edition of early Isabel Colgate novels, Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Alfred Kazin's *An American Procession* and a few other relatively meaty items. The book bag holds about twenty hard-covers and paperbacks. If there's room left, I'll just race around the airport shop and pig out on a batch of Michael Jackson biographies.

Helen Dudar is a journalist and critic who lives in New York City.

LEANNE SCHREIBER

I recently resigned my position as an editor at *The New York Times Book Review* which, among other things, means I am no longer limited to reading books that will be published two months hence. A recent trip to a secondhand bookstore upstate brought Edmund Wilson's *An American Earthquake: A Documentary of the 20s and 30s* into my hands; I will begin the summer with that. To give equal time, I will reread Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. For local color (I'm spending the summer in Tuscany), McCarthy's *The Stones of Florence* and Kate Simon's *Italy: The Places in Between*.

I'm also packing James Baldwin's *Another Country*, for the simple reason that my mother snatched it out of my hands when I was 16 and I never got back to it. I intend to read at least one novel by John Edgar Wideman to see what I've been missing, and Evan Connell's *Mr. Bridge*, because how many times can you reread *Mrs. Bridge*? I want to read Robert Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes*

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in French Cultural History, but the cover is still too shiny, so I'll wait to see how it looks after sitting all summer in a dank New York storage closet. Whatever else I read will come to me by accident of travel. My effort throughout will be to curb my trained impulse to wonder whether I'm reading a page 1, page 7 or page 15 book.

LeAnne Schreiber is a former editor of The New York Times Book Review.

JOHN LEONARD

For me, *it's rereading* because clearly I missed the point the first time around. I need more history and political science. This is because I'm a liberal, like Rheinhardt in Robert Stone's *A Hall of Mirrors*: " 'I'm a liberal,' he called out, 'I don't accommodate that rebop.' " At the time, Rheinhardt was in a redneck bar in New Orleans:

> "Liberal," Rheinhardt screamed, "Yes! A liberal. A Decembrist! Down in the bowels of the earth caked with layers of drying mud there's a giant bell, daddy, down at the bottom of the sea swinging silently, and that's my bell, daddy, because I'm a liberal."

To the rednecks, Rheinhardt explicated, "You're a dirty Lovestoneite . . . you killed Sidney Hillman!"

Like me, Rheinhardt missed the point. There is no bell. Ask Sakharov or Nicaragua. And so it's back to basic texts. For instance, Guazzo on the wicked Sabbat in his *Compendium Maleficarum* (1626):

> The devil is president of the Assembly and sits on a throne in some horrid shape, as of a goat or a dog: and they approach him to adore him, but not always in the same manner. For sometimes they bend their knees as suppliants, and sometimes stand with their backs turned up, and sometimes kick their legs high up so that their heads are bent back, and their chins point to the sky . . . they turn their backs and going backward like crabs, put out their hands behind them to touch him in supplication. When they speak, they turn their faces to the ground: and they do all things in a manner foreign to the use of other men.

For another instance, there's the account in the *Lalita Vistara* of the attack of Mara, the devil of tantric Buddhism, on the redeemer Bodhisattva:

> Some with the skin of oxen, asses, boars, ichneumons, stags, rams, beetles, cats, apes, wolves, and jackals, were spitting snake venom—and swallowing balls of fire, breathing flame, sending down a rain of brass and molten iron, calling up black clouds, bringing black night, and making a great noise—were running toward the Bodhisattva.

The first time I read these basic texts, because I am a liberal, I thought they were merely excellent examples of sports reporting—on, say, professional football, or Lebanon. I failed to appreciate what Melville called "this black conceit."

But I am wiser now at the bottom of my sea. To appreciate the blackest of conceits, I shall seek out something scholarly, something deconstructed, on Aelius Gallus and his Roman legionnaires. (Perhaps readers of *The Nation* can advise.) Aelius Gallus and his imperial army were lost somewhere in the vicinity of Ethiopia or Persia, looking for the coast after a bad time at the gates of Sheba. It is said that Nabatean guides misled the legionnaires to an inland sea, "with its motionless waves and beaches covered with bluish shells." I am quoting André Malraux in *Anti-memoirs*:

> Just as Xerxes had had the Aegean flogged, their general decided that, having failed to take the city, he would take the sea. Crazed by the sun-god, he dreamed of returning to the Capitol with his army laden with the shells in which he saw the spirit of this sea that no Roman had ever beheld. He drew up his troops in order of battle facing the waves. The beetles of Rome entered the tepid water at the command of the war trumpets; each soldier stooped, cuirass flashing in the sun, filled his helmet with shells and went back without breaking ranks, holding a helmetful of echoing murexes or conches, to meet death by sunstroke.

And: "For two centuries Arab travelers reported seeing an army of skeletons up to their breastplates in the sand, each with its skinny fingers holding up toward the sun a helmetful of shells."

Well, we all know how reliable Malraux was. Sometimes I think that Malraux killed Sidney Hillman. Sometimes I think that *I* killed Sidney Hillman. Someone *must* be to blame for the insanity. And so I will reread the prints on my fingers.

John Leonard is a novelist, co-host of the Public Broadcasting System's First Edition *and television critic for* New York.

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P	■	I	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	L	■	Y
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N	■	M	■	S	■	N	■	R	■	R	■	E	■	O
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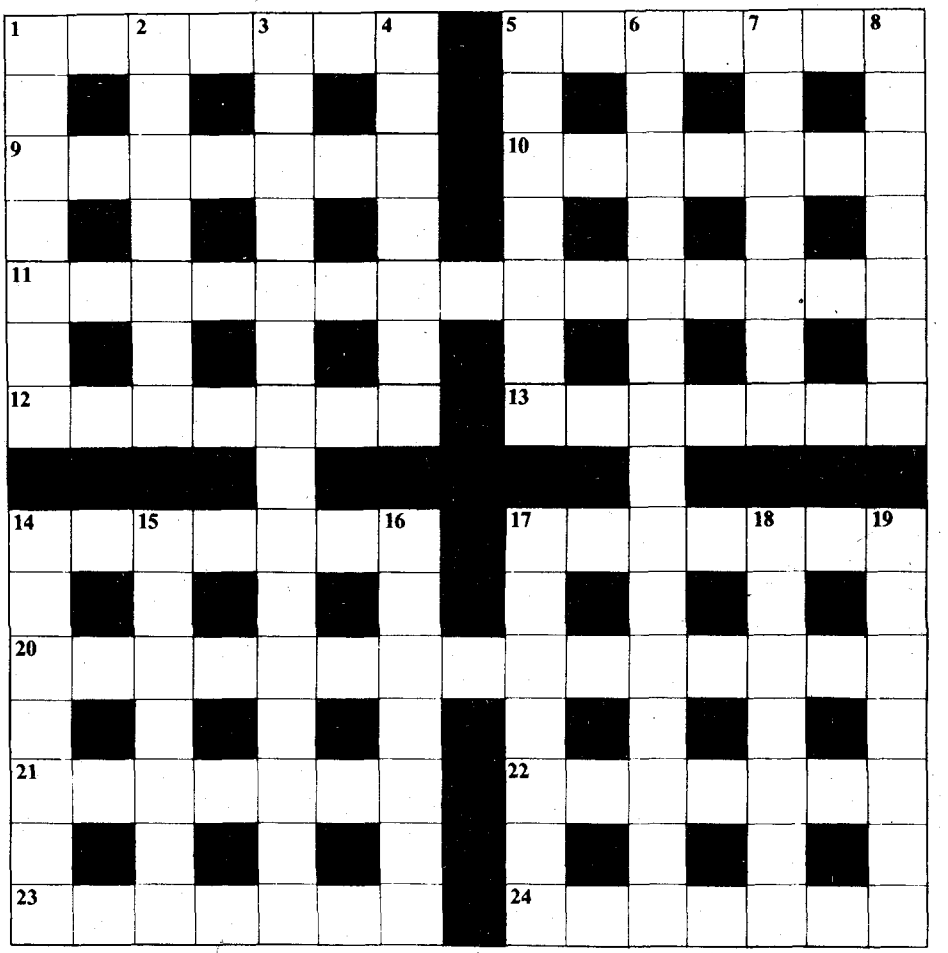

ACROSS

1 Former priests that might take part in M.S.D. (7)
5 Went back to make over something in color. (7)
9 Irascibility with a rather acute infectious disease. (7)
10 Possessing knowledge might be costing a lot of trouble! (7)
11 According to the ballad, one has climbed the heights, although it suggests where James's horseman might be found. (2,3,2,3,5)
12 According to the old saw, what has no remedy must be this. (7)
13 Dates we break because of what we did playing tennis? (7)
14 The results of missile launchings? (7)
17 Pawn might be taken when things are. (7)
20 What the hoopsters might be told to do with what sounds like a continuing story? (Might be rather corny!) (9,6)
21 In fact, in icicles chemically active. (7)
22 After a short time, mail gets sorted, so to speak. (7)
23 Passes two points—about what one might term a small mistake. (7)
24 Make a wild pitch? (Part is not right, if one is.) (7)

DOWN

1 It's sugar, so cures a certain amount of trouble. (7)
2 Sat with one's feet on the bar? (7)
3 Derby? It might typify what seems to be a royal mutation. (3,5,2,5)
4 With enough workers, a flag might be. (7)
5 Was the Roman general a star of the first magnitude? (7)
6 Those about bridges (before you come to them) or the Rubicon? (A dictionary might supply the answer.) (5,10)
7 Tried to make town—possibly to see Nathan on the stage. (7)
8 A duck might be arch indeed! (7)
14 A common tramp is confused by anger—and might take it with criticism. (7)
15 Bands of color, precast by mistake. (7)
16 Taken by many drivers who hope to get "good Going" on the green. (7)
17 Stop up? Stop up? What a place for a conference! (7)
18 It caused a certain amount of anger and rage, oddly enough! (7)
19 Sort of lied to the German with a way to demarcate something. (7)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

PUZZLED?

No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules," send for those of Mr. Lewis to *The Nation*, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

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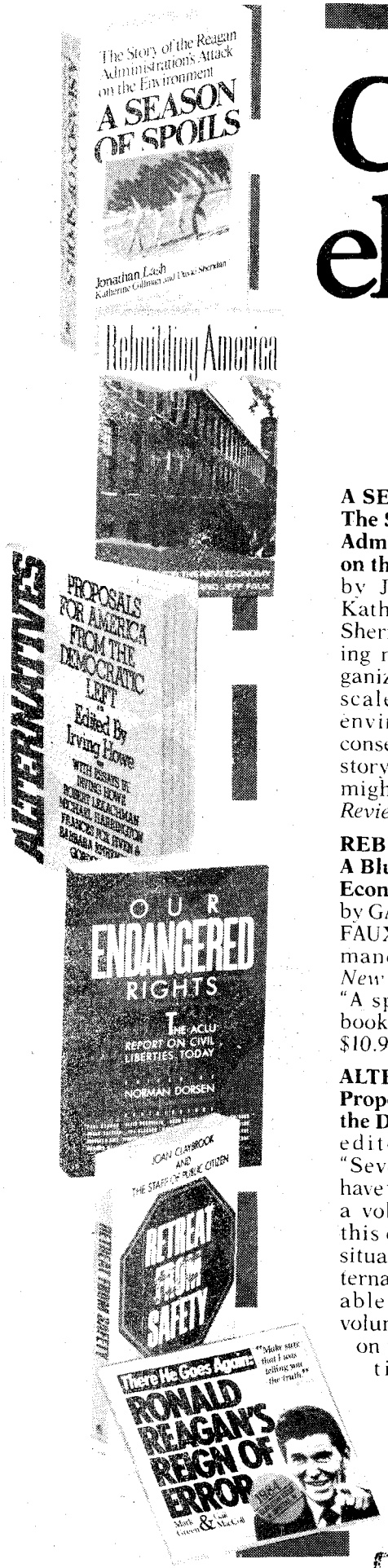
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